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The Years that the Locust hath Eaten

By
Annie E. Holdsworth
Author of
"Joanna Traill, Spinster"

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The Years that the Locust hath Eaten

CHAPTER I.

ONE OF THE QUEEN'S DAUGHTERS.

THE street was off the great thoroughfare of the Euston Road, one of the backwaters into which drifted some part of the city's human tide.

It was a dingy street; blocks on either side, leaving visible only a ribbon of sky. One of the houses had not yet donned London's smoky livery; it still wore the red that prates of youth and a future.

Here and there in its front it flaunted clean windows, curtains too, a pot or so of flowers. Up near the roof a cage hung, and the bars did not confine the lark's song that thrilled and fluttered and rose, as if on strong wings, skyward.

I

The music flooded the streets and the flats, and sounded pleasantly in No. 30, where the furniture, newly unpacked, had about it a quaint suggestiveness of the country. The same suggestiveness might have been seen in the young man who was lounging ineffectually about the flat elaborately accomplishing nothing. In No. 37 the lark's song silenced a girl's voice airily running up and down a scale.

"It is time she was here," she said to herself impatiently. Then she lifted her voice on the bar of a song, bounded to a trill, and, pausing on a shake, tumbled a melody about the ears of the artist in the flat underneath. He stopped to listen, humming over the merry bars-" Hier kommt die Braut!" "Miss Tennant is getting on," he said. "You would think there was spring in the air, or love, or something. For a month she has lived in a winter of scales, and the bird hasn't sung a note, and now they are matching each other. Confounded grey day, too-no light to speak of. What a row those people are making next door! Beastly nuisance moving!" whistled an air, "See the Conquering Hero Comes." When he recognised it he broke off laughing.

"It's a regular chorus of welcome! the three



ONE OF THE QUEEN'S DAUGHTERS.

of us hailing the new tenant—probably a fat charwoman with a nebulous 'dear departed' another of life's little ironies."

He shrugged his shoulders and settled to his painting. But he could not work—a vague expectation controlled the brush; the noise next door made him restless, and overhead he could hear Gertrude Tennant moving about, crossing to the window, strumming a bar on the piano, going to the window again. She spent a good deal of time at the window. He had often thought it would be pleasant to live opposite to her.

But hers was not the only face at the window that day. There were noses flattened against many panes in the Regent's Buildings, and heads hanging across the sills.

At the window where the lark sang a red handkerchief made a show as of bunting. The dancing rag caught Gertrude's eye. She threw her sash wide, glancing impatiently to the pavement.

"Four o'clock, and no sign of her! ... I wonder what all this excitement is about?"

Down on the flags she could see a group of residents—working men's wives chiefly, and working women's husbands; and further along the

street knots and clusters of people, thickening towards the Euston Road end. "What can be happening? It is not a funeral; they seem to be expecting someone."

She drew in her head and looked round her discontentedly; but the discontent was not levelled at the room. That satisfied her sense of fitness. It was essentially feminine—all "art" screens and down cushions. There was a piano, but it was subdued by a standard lamp in a frilled shade. No, it was not the room that was wrong.

She had been expecting her fate all the afternoon—in fact, had put off her singing lesson in order to hear it, and she was still unsentenced. She felt the earnest woman's disgust at the loss of an opportunity.

"Perhaps she has met with an accident, and the crowd has gathered to see her carried into the hospital," she thought, fondling the idea of Nemesis arm-in-arm with Lachesis. Suddenly the gay chorus broke again from her lips—

"Treulich geführt
Hier kommt die Braut."

It stopped as suddenly...

"Mrs. Gibson, what is going on?" she called to one of the heads at the next window.

ONE OF THE QUEEN'S DAUGHTERS.

Mrs. Gibson turned a bulging eye towards her.

- "Some o' the r'yalties going to the station."
- "Oh! Which of them?"
- "I can't rightly tell. Some says one thing, some another. But it's one of the Queen's darters."

Gertrude drew in her head.

"That all?"

But restlessness drove her forth again.

- "What is Jimmy saying, Mrs. Gibson?"
- "He wants to know if she will 'ave on a crown, so as he can tell 'er by; and I tells 'im she will look just like common flesh and blood."
- "Then how will I know what one she is, mother?"
- "Oh, you'll tell her easy; she'll smile and bow, and p'raps she will 'ave a carriage and pair all to 'erself."
 - "Mother, won't she be lonely?"
- "Lor no! she's r'yalty, child. They're used to it."
- "I hear the music! I can see sojers! She is coming, mother!"
- "Bless the boy! Keep still, will yer? You'll fall out the windy. There won't be no music and no sojers—she'll just go by in a carridge."
 - "Then wot's the good of lookin', mother?"
 - "You're right, child. We looks because every-

body looks, and that's the long and short of it. But you may just as well look at Miss Tennant for all that you'll see—better. I'll be bound the princess ain't so good-looking!"

"Oh yes, Jimmy," put in Miss Tennant; "it is worth while looking, if only to say you've seen a noble lady—one of the greatest in the land. Besides, she has made a success of her position; and a successful woman is a spectacle for gods," she added cynically. "I think she is coming now—see, the people are moving!"

But it was only to make way for a furniture van that had turned into the street and was rolling up to the Buildings.

"That's the worst of these buildins," said Mrs. Gibson, giving one eye to the van and the other to the road. "Folks is always comin' and goin'—it's only gentry like you and Miss Cardrew and Mr. Malden that stops any time. And I'm sure I don't know wot gentlefolks does livin' here."

Gertrude laughed lightly.

"Gentlefolks are working people nowadays. Besides, we can't afford to move often—Mr. Malden can't put extra windows into his studio every few months; and my piano is a very fast anchor. Do you know whose furniture that is coming in?"

- "The new people at 30, I expect. They was to come in to-day. Newly married they are."
- "Yes, I know. They are friends of Miss Cardrew's."
 - "Mother, mother! ain't she comin' now?"
- "No, child. And I'm sure I wish she was, keeping me idlin' all day!"
- "I am wasting my time too; I must go in," said the girl, retreating from temptation and gossip. Inside the room the absentee again ruffled her brows.
- "I felt certain she would come, so much hangs upon it—my career—everything. Well, it is useless to wait any longer; I will have tea and go out."

Stephen Malden was going out too, as she ran down the steps ten minutes afterwards. He waited for her, lifting his soft felt. In spite of his shabby tweed coat, he was attractive, and his eyes looking down at the girl's little figure were kind and pleasant. He was thinking that her short nose made her face piquant. It was not the first time he had thought so.

- "Do you share the general expectation, Miss Tennant?"
- "What of? Oh, the princess. All this fuss is a little absurd, isn't it? Jimmy Gibson has

been flying his red handkerchief in her honour all the afternoon."

- "And you have been singing royally. Was that in her honour?"
- "Indeed, no! I sang royally because I was disappointed royally. Madame Schombert was to have come to hear me, and she didn't. I am afraid you have been idle again; you never listen when you are busy. How much work have you done to-day?"
- "Very little—this confounded expectation made me restless... Jove, what a perfect face!"

He sank his voice and was silent. They drew aside to make way for a girl coming up the steps.

She seemed unconscious of their presence—her eyes smiling, her lips parted, her face brilliant with eager life.

Malden turned and stared after the figure swinging lightly upward. Then he rejoined Gertrude.

- "What is that girl doing in a place like this? Do you happen to know her?"
- "It is Mrs. Momerie—the new tenant at No. 30."

PRISCILLA HANGS HER PICTURES.

CHAPTER II.

THE tidiness that Priscilla Momerie loved was at length evident in No. 30. Barrels of straw, empty packing-cases, rags of paper had all disappeared. Even the hall was swept and garnished. She had herself washed the flags of the passage. Mrs. Gibson passing had turned up her nose at the streaky effect: "If she couldn't do things properly she should ha' let 'em alone."

Priscilla had been disappointed that no one had gone by to admire her bare arms, and her hands in the dirty suds. She was proud of her work; and distinctly surprised that her husband had taken it for granted. He neither noticed nor admired her skill as furnisher and decorator; yet only a week before his talk had crystallised around the strings of the little bonnet she had made. She could never wear it again without thinking of the charming fancies with which he had decked it. She reflected, blushing as her thoughts alighted on

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the fence dividing them, that in his class woman was naturally a housewife. It was only in her set that a practical woman was a person of distinction.

"The necessary virtues may be admirable," she thought, "but it is only when they are unnecessary that they are admired. At Frodsham, now, if I had swept a room it would have been thought a flight of genius."

She laughed, and travelled round the flat with a pleased eye. Bedroom, sitting-room, kitchen; the plain garments of existence, no frills, no embroideries. Well, she could not have done the work of a larger flat. Besides, for two people—and Dunstane out the most part of the day—three rooms were ample. She lingered in the sitting-room; that was where she would write, at the bureau that had seen the birth of her novel.

Her father's anger had sent the furniture of her rooms after her: "He would have nothing in the Rectory to remind him of her."

"To be sure, he had long since got rid of his conscience," she thought.

She shook off unpleasant memories. The merry light came back to her eyes. After all, what a help the things had been in furnishing!

PRISCILLA HANGS HER PICTURES.

"Dunstane, I wish you would do more and dream less."

Her husband raised himself from the sofa, and stood up, his air half-amused, half-apologetic, wholly devoted. He was a thin man, loosely made. He had a clever face; it would have been keen but for the dreaminess of his pale eyes. They looked long-sighted, as if they missed earth and saw the heavens. As a matter of fact they could not see the horizon. He had a soft, fair moustache. His forehead was high, promising imagination and fine instincts. It was his expression that had caught Priscilla's fancy.

- "You healthy young women have no respect for the ideal," he said with a tender glance at her.
- "You teach me the connection between ideals and hysteria," she laughed. "But what have they to do with hanging pictures?"
- "The pictures represent your young ideals... They satisfied the girl; but they can have no place in the life of a married woman."
- "Is marriage the bourn from which no ideal returns?" she laughed. "But still, I don't understand you."

He came forward, and pinched her ear.

- "What a dense little goose it is! Don't you see that these things look rather out of place in the parlour of mature married people? They were appropriate enough in your school-room or boudoir."
 - "Do you mean the furniture?"
- "Yes; but especially the prints—they are not large enough and the frames are not handsome enough; I like massive frames."

Priscilla's face flushed.

- "They are Botticellis, dear. They don't need frames."
- "Botticellis, are they? Well, they look old-masterly... But I never could understand the craze for saints and angels and madonnas. Give me something modern—a good Cooper."
- "The gentle domestic cow!" Priscilla mocked.
- " Meanwhile the pictures are not hung."
- "Well, what's the hurry, sweetheart? There's the whole evening before us. Come and sit beside me; I want to talk to you. For three days I have lost my wife in the housewife."
- "And a capital way in which to lose her," she said vigorously.

There was a moment's interlude. From below there came the sound of a low, regular tapping. It was the coffin-maker at his trade in the basement. Priscilla's face changed as she heard him. Then she freed herself from Dunstane's arms.

"We must really get on, Dunstane. They have a baby at No. 29, and the knocking will disturb it later."

A mild amusement dawned on the man's face.

- "Are you always going to measure your conduct in the bushel of the community?"
- "What else can we do? We are part of the Buildings now; there are other people."
- "They will not affect us. You don't want to be on visiting terms with the chimney-sweep's wife, do you? By the way, he has already left his card."

Priscilla's eyes sparkled; her face dimpled.

- "If she has babies I do! Dunstane, have you ever thought how grubby, and sooty, and dear the wee mites will be in a place like this? I shall want to begin by a general tubbing."
- "You might, with advantage, begin on yourself—I know someone who is very grubby, and very sooty, and very, very dear."

Priscilla examined her hand and laughed—a gay chime of laughter that passed the walls and tinkled in Malden's ears in the next flat.

He looked up from his work with a delighted smile. It was the prettiest thing that Regent's

Buildings had heard for many a day; prettier than Gertrude Tennant's surprising vocal gymnastics, rarer than the lark's song. People might sing in the Buildings, professionally; they seldom laughed there.

Momerie looked at the girl with a funny protest in his eyes.

"Priss! Priss! what a bad child you are! Hide your laugh under the bushel of the community. You will wake all the babies in the building."

"If I could only wake you from your dreams!" she cried gaily. "Here, give me the hammer. I am going to put up the pictures myself."

He watched her climb the step-ladder and stand gingerly on the top.

Her pose set him talking of heights, ideals, ambition. Priscilla listened as she worked. Dunstane talked so well on these subjects, it was an inspiration to hear him.

"Steep is the road to the gods," he said. And then he talked of the book he had come to London to write—"A New Religion," he called it; and his fancy played about Priscilla and his work.

"His New Religion was a ladder. Scaling it, the soul hung the world with pictures—saints

PRISCILLA HANGS HER PICTURES.

and angels and madonnas. Life was the nail, opportunity the hammer."

"The hammer on your own nail prints failure," Priscilla mumbled, her thumb in her mouth.

He was so busy talking that he forgot to pity her; he forgot to hand picture or hammer or nail to her. She had to mount and descend and mount again before her work was done.

He was roused at last by a cry, and looking up, he saw her sitting on the top step, her back against the wall, her hands over her eyes.

- "My darling, what is the matter?"
- "Please help me down, I am so giddy."

But he did not move. Priscilla opened her eyes, looking reproachfully.

"Are you not going to help me, Dunstane?"

He went forward then, anxious and solicitous, and guided her down. His arm was round her. The colour came back to her face. She glanced at him brightly.

- "Stupid, wasn't it? But it is an old trick of mine to get dizzy. I was not meant for the heights."
- "You are a headstrong person. You should have let me hang the pictures."
- "You were so busy talking. And you wouldn't help me when I called."

- "Dearest! No, for the life of me I couldn't move."
- "Dear boy! I nearly fell. After all," she went on meditatively, "it was my place to set up my ideals in my new life, my saints and angels and madonnas. I feel I have really achieved something."

She surveyed the walls, triumph changing to dismay.

- "You are right, Dunstane," she said with a tragic air, "my ideals are all crooked!"
- "Ah, I knew you would agree with me! Confess now. Don't you call this room a maiden's bower?"

Her eyes travelled round, seeing the bureau with bursting pigeon-holes, the cupboard whose glass doors hinted of old china, the twine carpet on the floor, the wide Chesterfield, the straw-seated chairs. They did not convict her of maidenliness. They had always appeared too strenuous in the old days, but she had been proud to suggest a vigour of mind in the things she gathered round her.

It was perhaps their simplicity that Dunstane confounded with effeminacy. She swung away from the thought.

PRISCILLA HANGS HER PICTURES.

"Tell me how you would have furnished your room, Dunstane."

But though she listened to his description with peals of laughter, pointing his periods with "Silly boy!" and "Old goose!" her heart dropped like a dead bird.

- "Dunstane, tell me about your mother," she cried, "I am tired of furniture."
- "My mother? There is nothing to tell about her."
- "Oh yes; she was a nice little apple-faced woman, and her shop was the prettiest and cleanest in Frodsham. I loved to go in. I know she used to put sand in the sugar, and she went without it in her tea. She skimped herself for the clever son at Cambridge, dear old thing!"
- "It was my uncle who sent me to Cambridge," said Dunstane prosaically; "he left the money for the purpose. He had faith in my abilities. Not like my father. Before he died he bought me that annuity because I was 'a poor tool and would make nothing out." The prophet in his country again!"

He shrugged his shoulders—a movement that betrayed the forgiveness he accorded his father's memory.

"He was paralysed for years, wasn't he?"

Priscilla asked. "I remember him—he was a shrewd man and very much respected."

- "He did not live to see his mistake, poor father! Do you know, Priscilla, I am proud of my pass degree. I sacrificed my 'Honours' to a son's love for his mother."
- "But, Dunstane," Priscilla opened her eyes, "I heard of it at the time. Poor old lady, she wanted so to see you before she died, and you were only in time for the funeral."
- "That was the sad part of it. My finals were ruined by my anxiety for her. She died while I was taking the last paper."
- "I didn't know that was what kept you away," she said coldly. "I would have sacrificed a hundred degrees sooner than disappoint her. Poor old mother!" Her voice was passionate with reproach.
- "Ah, Priscilla! there comes in the girlish ideal!" he answered lightly. "Now let us dismiss the past. I have turned my back on the grocer's shop for ever and ever. I hold nothing but the future!"

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CHAPTER III.

"BEHOLD, THIS DREAMER COMETH."

PRISCILLA had married without her father's consent, but not without his knowledge. She had always been too proud and fearless to conceal any act of hers.

The step had been taken in broad daylight, in sight of all Frodsham, tearful at losing the Rector's daughter, scandalised that she should throw herself away on the grocer's son.

Priscilla's first memories of Dunstane hovered round triangular little packets of peppermint that he used to give her over the counter, she, on tiptoe, stretching up a chubby hand to receive them. She had offered to kiss him in those days, and had only been prevented by the counter between them.

Dunstane did not like these reminders. The years at Cambridge had cloven a sharp division between his birth and himself. It was possible, he thought, for anyone to live with him and not

discover his humble origin. Priscilla had not lived with him a month. But his origin troubled her less than it troubled him. From the days of proffered kisses to the grocer's son she had been regardless of class differences.

She scarcely knew the stern Rector, who could not forget that the child had cost her mother's life. He had left her to servants who had spoiled her as far as was possible. So she grew up with no fine distinctions to teach her that flesh and blood in itself cannot inherit the kingdom of society. No gospel of gold had been thrown at her, stunning her humanity. Whoever showed her kindness was kin to her; and there was not a person in the village that was not gentle to the child who loved everybody and claimed love as her right.

When her governess arrived it was too late to teach Priscilla that she did not belong to the people. But it was not too late to set her mind to work. Miss Cardrew was a spinster who mingled sentiment and fiction, and was known in literary circles as a purveyor of sensations. In real life she lived by her knowledge of grammar and kindred excellences. She taught Priscilla all she knew, and found her an apt imitator in the art of novel-making. The scholar had more

"BEHOLD, THIS DREAMER COMETH."

imagination than the teacher; and it was easy to weave romances round the stories she heard in the village. Before Miss Cardrew left her, Priscilla was contributing to a magazine of the humbler sort. As she grew up, people called her unconventional, and the adjective, clinging like a burr, pricked her curiosity. The study of conventions opened out what was not conventional, and she learned a good deal of human nature and some elemental truths in her quest after knowledge. She accepted a few rules of society—she learned to dress her hair, to wear gloves on occasion, to leave her book when a visitor called, a rare event at the Rectory. For the rest..

What could be expected of a girl who tramped the moor at all seasons, in all weathers; who made friends with gypsies, and was intimate with gamekeepers? She might be seen any day wheeling out old Betsy Huggins in the wicker chair she had bought for her by sacrificing a new frock. And when she had taken Betsy home she would be flying across the green, a baby on her shoulder, and a troop of shouting children at her heels.

She was the darling of the village; but Frodsham society—the doctor's wife, the three Miss

Speaights, and the auctioneer's widow—would have given her a stronger adjective than "unconventional" if they had known one. But with Priscilla's gay face beaming on them, and Priscilla's laugh, the brightest thing in their drab lives; with her demure gratitude for their advice, and equally demure ignoring of it—what could they do but whisper the word among themselves? It was some relief to them that while it condemned Priscilla it gave her a certain distinction.

At twenty she published a novel. It achieved a succès de scandale. One day in her little white bed in her little white room at the Rectory, Priscilla awoke and found herself—yellow.

She would have fled and hidden herself and the hot consciousness the press comments gave her; but where could she be better hidden than in her own village?

Literature halted painfully and grudgingly at Frodsham.

All London might be straining to catch a glimpse of the daring young author. At Frodsham she was only "Parson's Lass," and nobody would have troubled to read her book if they had known she had written one.

She hid her success like the Spartan his fox.

"BEHOLD, THIS DREAMER COMETH."

It was when the thing was tearing at her vitals and threatening betrayal that Dunstane Momerie came back to Frodsham to his mother's funeral.

His eyes told her that he had read her book. For the first time in her life she could not meet the gaze of a fellow-creature.

With an excellent discernment he avoided all allusion to literature. When his reticence had restored her confidence he spoke of her success.

It was his hand that drew the fangs from the beast hidden in her bosom, and he earned her passionate gratitude by giving back the self-respect she had lost. Her book had reached another soul. There was one who had read and not misunderstood her. The subject opened was entrancing; they were at once intimate.

She spent long hours on the moors with him; walking, talking, planning the future's real success. He, too, had ambition. He had drawn up a scheme for a great work, its title "A New Religion." Everything was ready but the needed data. He was going to London. The British Museum would furnish the materials he wanted. He had an annuity; he would do some coaching, and write the book that was to give a new hope and a new faith to the world.

He talked to her of his ideals, his aims.

Priscilla listened with wistful eyes. They were high and noble and large, making her own ambitions insignificant. She only wanted to write a book that would touch some heart. Momerie's aspirations coursed the universe, travelling too swiftly and too far for self to keep pace with Brave in tinsel and trappings, they them. shamed her homespun ideals. While she saw her own shortcomings, she did not see that her energy tired him physically and mentally. keep abreast with her he had to strain. talked! swinging away with that graceful stride of hers, her cheeks aglow, her hair tossed, her eyes claiming all the soul in him.

Momerie's nature was not easily stirred, else he must have leaped the hedges weeks before circumstances levelled them.

Priscilla had left him in her usual high spirits. An hour after she came back, passionately claiming his sympathy. The trouble overflowed at his first question.

Yes, everything was wrong—everything! Her father insisted on her marrying Sir George Oldham, and sooner than do it she would kill herself. But she was not a coward—she would not die. She would go to London and support herself by literature . . .

"BEHOLD, THIS DREAMER COMETH."

With what a fatal facility it had all happened!
... An hour after everything was settled.

He was on his way to London to write his book. They would marry immediately and hunt success in leash. It would be pleasanter to live together than apart—more economical too. And he talked of frugality and simplicity, high thinking and plain living. His ideal was a white dream of intellectual desires;—they would live in an attic, near the stars.

Priscilla agreed heartily. In town the higher one lived the cheaper the rent, she told him.

His eyes reproached her.

"We should be nearer heaven."

"Yes, I thought of that too," she answered.

He was intoxicated by his sudden happiness. His heart reeled and his brain spun with it.

He talked of love, of its joys, its sacrifices, "The light that never was on sea or land."

Priscilla realised that she had never loved, but Dunstane would teach her, she said humbly.

She did not ask herself if she loved him now. He thrilled her aspirations; surely a higher thing than the thrill of passion. With him beside her she could not fail of realizing all her dreams.

They had youth, ambition, health, hope, genius, opportunity;—what more was needed for

success? He was a good man, reverent, delicate, true. How beautifully he had spoken of the Church's benediction and the sacrament of marriage! It was doubly hard after what he had said that she should have to put up with the legal contract at the registrar's office. In a storm of paternal anger,—her dowry, the tears of the villagers, she turned her back on Frodsham. Mrs. Dunstane Momerie fronted success.

CHAPTER IV.

PRISCILLA MAKES FRIENDS.

GERTRUDE TENNANT was coming up the steps. Malden saw her, and waited for her. He was conscious of a decent coat; and more than conscious of the glove into whose service he had pressed four fingers. Only his respect for a beautiful woman would have made him do it.

Seeing that Miss Tennant also bore traces of the respectability provided by the tailor, he regained his ease; two wrongs sometimes make one right.

- "How festive you look!" he said gaily.
- "And you! I scarcely recognised you. Are you under the impression this is Sunday?"
- "No, a saint's day only. I am going to call on Mrs.—on Mr. Momerie."
- "I am going to call too, on Mr.—on Mrs. Momerie."
 - "You knew her before?"

- "No, it was Miss Cardrew who told me about her."
 - "The little spinster? How comes she . . .?"
- "She was governess, years ago. That is why the Momeries came here. Miss Cardrew suggested it."
- "Ah! I wondered how in the world she had drifted in among the unwashed and unconventional. Imagine the spinster . . .!"
- "Mrs. Momerie doesn't believe in conventions—she used to follow the hounds on foot, climbing gates, leaping ditches."
- "I hope she can't hear us. Poor little girl—to end in these vaults!"
- "I must go upstairs and get rid of my parcels," said Gertrude.
- "Let me carry them up for you. What, crumpets! May I come to tea? You will have tea, won't you, after the state visit?"
- "What a boy you are! Yes, you may come if you wish to."

Being ten years younger than Malden, Gertrude could afford to be motherly. "You will get no work done this afternoon. How is the picture progressing?"

"It's at a standstill. Here are your parcels. Take care of the crumpets."

"I will, since they attract you."

She was not like a person setting out on a career. She looked like an ordinary woman who sees nothing but marriage before her—a dainty spider weaving a net.

- "Tell me more about Mrs. Momerie," said Malden, following her into the web of screens and cushions. "Give me a few pegs on which to hang conversation."
- "Can you go back to the rudiments? country, and babies, and domestics?"
 - "I will try."
- "Can you recommend a good blacking for the grate?"
 - "Do you mean black-lead?"
- "I never mean anything;—it is too inartistic. If you are au fait with these things you will suit Mrs. Momerie perfectly."
- "Do you know, Miss Tennant, I have never seen you spiteful before?"
 - "It is the fit of my frock," she answered.

His brow cleared, he looked his sympathy.

"So it is. Small waists are bound to make one critical and unsympathetic. It's better to hear you singing to Jimmy Gibson in an old dressing-gown than to hear you attacking Mrs. Momerie in the latest fashion."

She flushed hotly. Then she laughed.

"Who told you about it? Besides, it was my new tea-gown. An old dressing-gown, indeed!"

He laughed. "Now, then, let us sacrifice to conventions; we shall return to nature and crumpets."

"A man's usual programme," she mocked.

Mrs. Momerie opened the door for them herself, laughing at the triangular introduction that followed. There were no conventions in her manner. Malden thanked heaven, and took courage. She was very friendly and cordial, leading them into the sitting-room. Gertrude noticed that her frock fitted; she respected her for it.

Mr. Momerie was out, but Priscilla was not alone. Miss Cardrew, a thin little woman in a white front and spectacles, was perched on a chair, a hassock under her feet. A small island of humanity adrift on the main of the Chesterfield, lay Jimmy Gibson.

"You know Miss Cardrew; and I need not introduce my invalid," said Priscilla merrily. "Jimmy has been telling me all about you. I recognise his "pretty lidy" in Miss Tennant. And wasn't it Mr. Malden who spent a whole morning painting angels and lilies for him to look at?"

- "Yes," Jimmy interrupted, "it was him. Mother was out nursing, and he carried me into the room and amoosed me."
- "Mr. Malden finds time for many little kindnesses," said Miss Cardrew in a precise little voice.
- "You mean Miss Tennant," said Malden quickly. "Ask her about her dressing-gown!"

A faded colour mounted to Miss Cardrew's face. She hung her head consciously.

- "Some other time," she murmured. "It is scarcely a subject . . . before a gentleman."
- "It was a tea-gown, Miss Cardrew." Gertrude's voice, clear and prosaic, would have tried any sentiment and found it wanting.

The spinster looked relieved. "My dear, that makes a difference."

Priscilla's face was all dimples. She laughed gaily.

- "I am so glad you have come together," she said. "You teach me to know you at once."
- "And you will know there are no more callers to expect," said Gertrude practically.
- "I believe I have had everybody," said Priscilla. "My husband thinks we must have come amongst the unemployed; so many people have offered to be of use to us."

- "They will get over that," Gertrude answered. "When they have seen your flat and your furniture and your husband they will expect you to be of use to them."
 - "I suppose you know them all?" said Priscilla. Gertrude gave a little shudder.
 - "I couldn't live here if I did."
- "Mrs. Gibson is a very respectable woman," said Miss Cardrew.
- "A descendant of Sairey Gamp, in the direct line," Gertrude added.
- "And you forget Mrs. Markham," Miss Cardrew said hurriedly. "An admirable woman... a drunken husband and five children... and she keeps them all."
- "She is very foolish," said Gertrude, "and unpractical. She works at a factory all day, and often sits up with a neighbour all night."
- "She would be a general benefactor if she kept her rooms and her children clean," said Malden.

Priscilla did not smile. "Poor soul! how can one expect it? Tell me about the others."

"I don't know any others; there are dressmakers and charwomen and carpenters and railway men; we are the aristocracy, the people with something to live for." Gertrude looked at him. She had another ambition that she had not talked to him about, yet.

- "Mr. Malden's only aim in life is to be hung on the line at Burlington House," she retorted.
- "These ambitions are sure to be gratified," said Miss Cardrew, shaking her white front. "I only wish that mine was as certain of realisation."
- "You want to be famous too, Cardie dear. I remember you used to tell me your hopes." Priscilla looked fondly at her.
- "No, my dear, I have given up all that years ago. I only want a cottage in the country now, and perhaps a little shop to keep me busy. No, my dear, I shall leave fame to you. You will succeed, and it will make me very proud and happy to see it. Our dear Mrs. Momerie will write a great book some day," she explained to the others.

Priscilla laughed gaily. "Ah, some day!" Then she turned quickly to Gertrude. "There are a good many children in the Buildings. I suppose you know them all?"

- "No indeed! Dirty little mortals! It is not as if they were pretty, or interesting, or even clean."
 - "But they are children!" said Priscilla.

The word covered a multitude of sins.

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- "They are very noisy, my dear, and very poor," said Miss Cardrew.
- "I am glad they are poor," said Priscilla. "I like poor people. I like to live in buildings among them. But I cannot imagine why you came here."

She looked inquiringly at Gertrude. Certainly a neat little figure, a tailor-made gown, youth, and a prosperous air were alien to working men's buildings.

- "Oh, Mrs. Momerie, you must not think because I have put on my best frock to call on my friends that I am not a working woman too. I give music-lessons to pay for the training that is to make my voice my fortune."
- "Ah, I thought I heard a lark singing upstairs one day," said Priscilla.

But Jimmy spoiled the little compliment.

"It was Miss Cardrew's," he said shrilly. "It was stoppin' in our room while she was aw'y."

They all laughed, and there was a pause.

Priscilla was thinking of her interrupted writing. But what matter? Life here was more interesting than novels. The poor people filled her heart; Gertrude and Malden, artist and singer, touched her imagination. Miss Cardrew was more entertaining than anything she had ever written.

"I see you have some fine Botticellis, Mrs.

Momerie," Malden interrupted her thoughts. "'Tobias and the Angels' is a great favourite of mine."

The thought in Priscilla's eyes broke into a sparkle.

"Is it? I love it too," she said heartily. "I like the beautiful free stride of that angel on the right. It is so wholesome and robust. I suppose you belong to the modern school?"

" Mostly," he answered.

Priscilla reflected that, however ready to talk about other people, this man was reticent about himself.

"Mr. Malden is suffering from laziness," Gertrude put in. "For a fortnight he has done no work at all."

"The artist new has so much to do He never has leisure to paint,"

Malden quoted.

At this moment the door opened, and Momerie came in. Priscilla sprang up and led him forward, naming the visitors. Dunstane was cordial, delighted that they had come to see Mrs. Momerie. It was so dull for her while he was at the Museum, "but we poor authors have to live."

"I am too tired to sit down," he added; "if the ladies will excuse me I will lie on the sofa."

"Indeed you look sadly fatigued," said the little spinster.

He turned fully round before he saw Jimmy on the sofa.

"My dear Priscilla," he said smiling, "you will have the place swarming with vermin. This is the third dirty brat you have had here to-day."

Priscilla laid her hand on his arm.

- "Poor little Jimmy is ill, dear. I promised to look after him till his mother came back. Come and sit here. We are just going to have tea."
- "Tea and sofa are not synonymous terms, Priscilla."

Malden rose in a leisurely fashion that seemed to lengthen out his inches.

"I must run away now, I am afraid, Mrs. Momerie. And look here, Jimmy, I'll take you into my room. You are quite used to stretching your legs on my divan, aren't you?"

The boy nodded. Malden saw the relief in Priscilla's eyes, but she protested.

"I promised Mrs. Gibson; I should be so sorry if he took cold."

Gertrude rose and shook hands with everybody. She had an engagement at 5.30. She glanced at Malden as she said it. Her eyes spelt crumpets.

He saw nothing but Priscilla's face.

"See here, Mrs. Momerie," he said eagerly, "if you care to come into my studio and see Jimmy settled, you can assure yourself he is quite out of draughts. Then your conscience will be at rest. I live next door, you know."

"I think I would like to do that," said Priscilla. She wrapped a shawl round the boy, but when she was going to lift him Malden stopped her.

"Excuse me, you must allow me to do that."

For a fortnight she had been moving furniture, lifting weights, all as a matter of course. Malden's thoughtfulness was a galaxy of recommendations that sparkled round him.

She laughed as she moved away. Malden lifted Jimmy and carried him out, she following.

He stood aside to let her pass into the studio, and she was well in the room before he saw what he had done. Priscilla turned at his muffled exclamation, but he did not explain it. She glanced round, her eyes searching for open windows.

"I think it is all right," she smiled; "and what a delightful room it is! Oh, that is the procession of angels carrying lilies, and . . . how very extraordinary!"

He did not ask the reason of her surprise. It took him some time to arrange Jimmy on the

divan. When he lifted himself he threw a swift, shy look at Priscilla.

She had no eyes for him, she was going from sketch to sketch wondering, exclaiming, laughing. He stood like a culprit in the midst of his work. There were studies of a woman's head in chalk, oils, water-colour;—and each was a portrait of Mrs. Momerie.

That night Malden tossed on his bed. Gertrude, too, was awake, with wide eyes staring into the darkness.

It was a very gay and happy Priscilla that filled a big basket the following Monday for her first wash.

The laundry of Regent's Buildings was as near the chimney-pots as practicable. This, not in order to catch the smuts, but because the flat roof offered a drying-ground and an invitation to sun and air.

Priscilla knew nothing about washing, but she was cheerfully ambitious of learning. Her toy ménage gave her the same amusement, but on a larger scale, that she had found in her doll's house. Dunstane was a fascinating live doll. It delighted her to wait upon him in this tiny house of hers; and he was not unwilling to be waited upon.

On this Monday morning he sat in an armchair lazily admiring her as she bustled about gathering up towel and table-cloth. With the same admiration he watched her balance the basket on her shoulder.

She turned coquettishly towards him, eyes dancing, cheeks brightening.

"Would you like to come up and see me at work, Dunstane?" she asked gaily.

He made a grimace.

- "Would you have me suffer the horrors of steam and suds, Priscilla?"
- "No, dear, of course not. But I thought it would amuse you to see me with my sleeves rolled up, acting laundry-maid."
- "I don't think it would. My remembrance of washing-day at home has nothing amusing about it. But you look charmingly pretty with the basket on your shoulder, darling."

She made him a mocking little curtsey.

"And what are you going to do while I am busy?" she asked.

His eyes studied the ceiling meditatively.

"I? Oh, I think I shall stroll into the park, and smoke a cigar."

Priscilla's face fell.

- "Dunstane dear, you said you would take me into the park this evening."
- "Did I?" he asked carelessly. "But then, darling, I did not think you would insist on washing to-day. Surely you would not have me waste all the morning waiting for you?"

Her face cleared.

"No indeed!" she exclaimed. "Go out and enjoy yourself, dear boy. I shall have the loveliest time washing the clothes. Really, Dunstane, it is very entertaining to manage a house. I feel ever so grateful to you for taking me away from my empty life at Frodsham."

Dunstane answered her affectionate look with a glance blended of condescension and superiority.

"Dearest child, when I have written my book, you shall have a home for which to thank me."

Priscilla's laugh rippled out.

"You prosy old thing! I don't want a better home than this."

She went through the hall thinking happily how dear and kind Dunstane was; and there was a new spring in her step as she mounted the stairs to the laundry.

Mrs. Markham and Mrs. Gibson were already there, and the two turned critical eyes upon her.

They could not accept Mrs. Momerie as one of themselves; and though she did not give herself airs, they were doubtful of her. There was something suspicious in a lady masquerading as a working woman; and they set up defences against her friendliness.

But when Priscilla began to mix flannel and linen, white and coloured, in water that had never tasted soda, Mrs. Gibson could not remain silent.

With elaborate indirectness she addressed Mrs. Markham.

"Town or country, rich or poor, washin' is washin'; and I can't abear to see good clothes spiled for the want of common sense. Them as doesn't know 'ow to wash should give out their clothes. There's plenty would be glad of the job."

Mrs. Markham's eyes persistently avoided Priscilla's corner.

"Them things wants a good dollying, not to speak of biling water," she said. "But I was never one to interfere; though it ain't in nature to see good clothes ruined . . ."

Priscilla did not stop her rubbing and wringing. Washing was the easiest thing in the world; one only needed soap and water and

muscles. She splashed away merrily till Mrs. Gibson could bear it no longer.

"You'll spile them fine things, Mrs. Momerie, mixing of them with dusters and kitchen towels," she said shrilly. "And you want hot water and washin'-powder. I never seed nobody wash clothes with scented soap before."

Priscilla looked up blankly. Then she laughed.

"I thought I was getting on famously, but it seems to be a mistake. You see I know nothing about washing clothes, but it looked as simple as washing one's face."

Mrs. Markham grunted. Then she wrung the soap from her hands and came across to Priscilla's tub.

"I'll just sort 'em for you, my dear," she said kindly. "Tain't to be expected you should know 'ow to wash flannins and such. You want soda and sunlight soap. Them tylet soaps ain't no good for clothes."

Priscilla looked on with interest while Mrs. Markham demonstrated the science of the laundry. Then Mrs. Gibson, not to be outdone, showed her a dolly-tub and the manner of its use. Priscilla listened with a gleeful humility that won their hearts. She was so pleased to be taught, and so grateful for their teach-

ing, that the two women forgot their suspicions. They began to enjoy their superior knowledge, and to forgive Priscilla her social standing; and soon conversation flowed, while the steam enwrapped them, and the piles of clothes passed from water to water.

"I never uses that tub," said Mrs. Gibson, nodding at the one which held Priscilla's things. "I can't abear the sight on it, not since Mrs. Pyke's Jennie were drownded in it."

"Ay, that was a bad business, that was," answered Mrs. Markham. "Her pore mother's never looked up since."

Priscilla gazed at them with questioning eyes. Her breath came quickly. Her hands had paused in their work.

"Was a child drowned in this tub?" she asked.

Her strained voice arrested attention. Mrs. Gibson's explanation became florid.

"Yes, that she was," she answered. "Little Jennie Pyke; and all the fault of the County Council. You see, Mrs. Momerie, they was afraid of a water-famine; and they cuts off the water, all but two hours a day. So we was obliged to fill up tubs and jars to keep enough over the night. And Mrs. Pyke she borrored

that tub. And the very first day Jennie was drownded in it. Her pore mother just run in to my room to borror the loan of a saucepan—she wasn't above five minutes gone—and when she got back Jennie was in the tub and never come to—though we got the doctor to her, and persevered for an hour to fetch her round."

"Ay, and the coroner give it accidentally drownded, though Mrs. Pyke said 'twas the fault of the County Council," added Mrs. Markham.

Mrs. Momerie said nothing. A mist of tears had shut out the scene of the pitiful little tragedy; and there was no more joy in her work.

She looked up with white cheeks and piteous eyes.

- "Mrs. Gibson..." she began, but could get no further. The sobs in her throat choked her. She hurried to the door, and down the steps to her flat, crying as she went.
- "She's a kind creetur," said Mrs. Markham sympathetically.
- "She'll 'ave to 'arden 'er 'eart if she's to 'ave any comfort in the Buildins," said Mrs. Gibson drily. "She ain't got much sense, goin' off and leavin' them clothes. The water will be dead cold before she gets back."

- "I'll just finish 'em off for her," said Mrs. Markham resignedly.
- "They ain't likely to have any colour with her washin'. Ah, poor thing, she's got a soft 'eart."
- "A bit o' soft-soap would be more good to 'er than feelins," returned Mrs. Gibson. "I doubt 'er 'usband will have a bad bargain with her, for all her pretty face and pretty ways. She ain't fit to be a pore man's wife."
- "She's clever enough about the house," said Mrs. Markham; "always scrubbin' and cleanin', she is; and a rare one for children."
- "My Jimmy's took to her wonderful," said Mrs. Gibson.
- "I'll give you a 'and with them clothes, Mrs. Markham . . . Well I never! Real lace and nainsook. Wicked hextravagance I calls it."

The daintiness of Mrs. Momerie's apparel kept the two tongues wagging for half an hour. At the end of that time Priscilla reappeared carrying a tray with tea and bread-and-butter. Her eyes were red, but her face dimpled and smiled. She would have laughed aloud if she had known how the hearts of her critics would melt under the gracious influence of those cups of tea.

CHAPTER V.

THE BUILDING OF THE FUTURE.

'THE fact is," said Dunstane breezily, "we ought never to have come to this place at all. A flat in Kensington would have made all the difference in the world to our position."

Priscilla's laugh rippled out.

"You foolish person; of course it would!"

The clatter of the Buildings was round them; the shuffle of uneducated feet; the flap of a woman's slipper down at heel. Shrill voices of children, misplaced aspirates, the crying of a baby for whom life is not padded, a muttered curse—these were the sounds made by the waves on the beach; beyond these, from the Euston Road, came fuller voices, the noise of traffic, the shriek and rush of trains, a strong subdued hum, the roar of the great human sea.

"One room further west would have been better than three here," Dunstane said. His voice held balances weighing sound.

THE BUIDING OF THE FUTURE.

Priscilla's eyes widened.

- "But, dear, one room! How could we?"
- "Plenty of people do."
- "Yes, I know; and I am so sorry for them. But you are not serious, Dunstane? It is better to live here humbly than to go further west, and sacrifice everything to show. Here we are among poor people, and we are near the stars."
- "The young girl's ideals again," he said, smiling. "When will my wife learn to be a practical woman?"
- "It is I who am practical," she returned quickly.

 "Before we were married you thought as I did; but now you want to stucco our lives with position and show and pretence. I am content to be a plain working woman."
- "You only succeed in being a little goosie gander!" he said, looking fondly at her. "Don't you see, darling, that I shall never get pupils so long as this place stamps me a poor man? What gentleman could I ask to come here among these hob-nails and baggy knees? I can't understand how I ever consented to live here. We have been five months in town, and I have done no coaching; I don't regret it so much, since I have an opportunity of getting on with the book. That

of course is the great thing to be considered. After all, the present does not count in the highest scheme of life."

Priscilla had to stop her writing to listen to him. He paced the room talking. He sketched the future when the world would be at his feet grateful for the new religion he had given it; he spoke of faith and hope that grasped the ideal on earth; Heaven was all very well, but no one had ever come from Heaven with credentials proving that a belief in it was well founded. Faith in one's self, in one's work, in one's future—a future that could be handled—that was Heaven; salvation. Life was real—no mere haze across an open grave. It was the worker who grasped immortality; the man who gave his mind, his thought, to the world. The book he was going to write would be an ethical bomb, shattering ancient fables. When truth was given to the world . . .

Priscilla listened with weary patience. She had heard it so many, many times in these five months!

- "Dunstane dear, I think you are making a mistake."
 - "What mistake, little wife?"
- "You are aiming too high. Army pupils and coaching are all very well when a man has estab-

lished himself, but one should be content to begin low."

- "Other men don't begin low. Felix of John's stepped into a good thing last week. No, Priscilla. 'Greatly begin,' that is my motto. A man sets his own standard; the world takes him on his own valuation."
 - "Till the world finds him out."

Momerie looked at her amiably.

- "You are quite content with Buildings. I aim at better things."
 - "A Castle in Spain!"

She did not smile as she said it. Momerie reflected that a pretty woman could have a very hard mouth. He had not noticed Priscilla's dimples for a long time.

- "Would you have liked me to take that nightschool and drum declensions into the head of the baker's apprentice?" he asked gaily.
- "I should have taken it in your place," said Priscilla equably. "The apprentice would not have been a baker; bakers work at night, in ghastly bake-houses, and they die soon—before they dream of declensions."

Her brow was troubled. That "women have no ambition" had bitten. She was beginning to

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distrust the word, to wonder if, in the struggle of life, ambition was altogether a good thing; for it was quite true that she was content to live in Regent's Buildings.

The blood in her veins had the thrill of health Life was full of interest, crammed with it; the bushel of the community was heaped and running over with it. She missed the country, but Regent's Park in the spring-when grass and trees have not put on dust and mortality—is not a bad substitute for fields and hedge-rows. She liked the sudden shooting of green spikes, the flame of the crocus, breaking out of the sward. It was prettier than the massed colours in the And cowslips and yellow kingcups were cheap in the Hampstead Road—she could make her room golden for twopence. She missed the nesting time of the birds-but London offered her more than Frodsham had ever given. people, oh, the people! Green leaf and blue sky had never touched her as these wan faces that waited at her threshold, and went with her up and down the wide city.

Wherever she went she heard the roar of the city like the voice of the people moaning. If she could only silence the moan! if she could only help them! If she could only bring the gladness

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back into the pitiful eyes of the children. But she could do so little. She was a poor woman like the women round her. Life had her, too, whirling her round in its great mill, grinding her heart down to the white hopelessness of want.

It would soon come to that with them, she saw with growing uneasiness. The money on which they had launched their little craft was getting less and less. There had been no rainfall to replenish the pool. Already the boat touched bottom. The mud was round them.

But Dunstane did not see that they were aground. He was only interested in the stream on which, by-and-by, they would float out to wider waters.

The present was nothing to him; had they not an annuity?

If Priscilla suggested that they could not live on ten shillings a week, he talked of the uses of adversity, the gilt on the other side of the shield. Poverty brought out the best in a man; endurance and fortitude were bread for the soul, to be bought without money. From this eloquent Hymn to Poverty he would go out, returning with a pair of spring chickens... "Courage, Priscilla! the larder is not yet empty."

His faith and optimism delighted her. They

were the sun in whose rays she found happiness. Life was a serious thing to her, and she could not sufficiently admire the ease with which Dunstane carried its burden. Then he leaned on her. And she was grateful to him that he had given her a place in the world. It might be difficult to bear the weight of Dunstane, by-and-by. Now,—it was an honour.

She set herself to her writing. She must work for the present and leave Dunstane to dream of the future. Dunstane's terms at Cambridge were a scaffolding he had set up for the raising of that But the planks and poles had taken the place of the building itself. Inside them there was nothing but the airy structure of his belief in himself and his great work. The only teaching that had come in his way was unworthy of a "'Varsity man." He looked at it and talked of the spirit that being deprived of the suitable accepts patiently the possible—but he did not take it. And, though the thought was still nebulous, Priscilla had disappointed him. In marrying her he had unconsciously built on her position; it made a good basis for that future around which the scaffolding was erected, and he had looked ahead even when blinded by the flash and blaze of his love. Whatever heights he reached.

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she at his side would not lessen them. But Priscilla had no influence, and her father would not help them; he had even refused Momerie's request that he would give a reference to pupils. Dunstane had found out that the Rector was an oyster in his shell; and his daughter was not the knife that would open the mollusc. Priscilla had no aspirations. All her ideas centred round the present; she could not see farther than to-day. Her advice was not "Hitch your waggon to a star," but "Hitch yourself to your waggon and pull." She had no imagination what-Still she was very pretty and very lovable; brave and sweet and patient. It was not often that her mouth looked hard; and no one should expect perfection in a wife. That would ruin all chance of domestic happiness. And she was cheerful too. What spirits she had! work nor east wind affected her. She laughed at the gloomiest day.

•He could have wished that she had more humour. Imagine his wife sitting on the public staircase—her lap full of little Markhams, who pulled her hair down and put grubby fingers into her eyes, unreproved! He had seen her on her knees in the kitchen dressing the rolling-pin with dusters to make a doll for a grimy child; yes,

Priscilla! He had come upon her on the hearthrug brooding blissfully over a cat and its kittens, and when he protested she had laughed in his face.

The cat was Malden's. The artist was as big a baby in his way as Priscilla in hers. They made a very good pair. That girl upstairs had more common-sense than the two put together. She had ambition, pertinacity, audacity—all the elements of success.

Priscilla took life too merrily, and from too low a standpoint: she would never succeed. A sudden tremor shook him;—might she not hinder his success?

- "My advertisement has been in the *Times* for weeks," he said cheerfully, "and it has not had one answer."
- "You should go to an agency, Dunstane, or advertise in the *Daily Chronicle*."
- "That labouring and belabouring organ?—ridiculous!"
- "If you are a labouring man you must look to labour to support you," she said practically.
- "But I am not a labouring man. You forget that, my darling."

She gave him a comical look.

"No, dear; I only wish you were."

He turned a reproachful face to her.

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"I can't bear to hear you laugh, Priscilla. It is no laughing matter. Until my work is finished we shall really have very little to depend on. Dearest, I would not care for myself, but you "—his voice broke.

Priscilla was touched. She would have told him of the novel under consideration at the publisher's, but she dared not share her hopes with him.

She had no doubt of its acceptance. After her success no publisher would refuse her book. And this was good work. Moreover its complexion was healthy.

"A Parish Romance" had brought her £70; she might reasonably expect £100 for her second book.

Hope danced after the Will o' the Wisp; but she would not tell Dunstane till she could lay the cheque in his hand. The break in his voice touched her. She went to him and put her arm in his. Together they paced the floor, and she was sympathetic while he told her of the progress his work was making. In another week or two he would begin to think of putting the preface into shape.

Suddenly he stumbled over a hassock.

"I don't know what is wrong with that leg," he

- said. "It is always either giving way or refusing to go on. This morning it stopped under the nose of a 'bus. I don't know why I wasn't run over."
- "You are growing nervous, dear. But come and sit down. I had forgotten that Mrs. Markham's room was under ours. We ought not to have been tramping about."
 - "What is wrong with the woman?"

Priscilla stopped and clasped her hands together, looking at him with shining eyes.

- "Guess!" she said ecstatically.
- "What a child you are!" he smiled. "How can I guess? Typhoid probably, though why it should make you happy-"
- "Dunstane! no, it is-I don't suppose you could guess-it is a baby!"

Her air was radiantly joyous, but her voice touched the last words with an almost solemn vibration.

- "That's the third since we have been here!" said Dunstane.
- "She has six," said Priscilla gravely. "But this is the first since we came to the Buildings."
- "There is something very attractive about a baby," he said. "An innocent white soul 'trailing clouds of glory." He talked of the heaven

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that lies about us in our infancy, of the helplessness and beauty of a little child, and Priscilla did not grow impatient. She hung upon his words, growing light-hearted as she listened, and he talked, echoing the thoughts that had made music in her soul.

When he finished she looked gaily into his face

- "I must tell you a good joke. I went to see the baby to-day—such a cosy, crying, red mite it is, you would love it."
- "Would I!" said Dunstane grimly. "But where does the fun come in? The baby is no joke."
- "No, I am coming to it. Mrs. Markham was sitting up, very grand in a white shawl a good deal the worse for wear. She explained that though she only wore it at her confinements it was getting dashed."
 - "And still I don't see the point."
- "You are worse than a Scotsman fronting a joke!" said Priscilla. Then her voice changed again to passionate pity: "And isn't it an awful thing? She works in a factory and can only spare a week;—think of it, dear, only a week to get strong in; and the little baby needing her at home. Ah, how cruel it is! When I think of

it I could go up and down the country and never rest till I had got right laws made for poor women."

"You would waste a good deal of time, Priscilla. Thank goodness, we have nothing to do with 'infants crying in the night.' That would be a complication I could not stand."

Priscilla looked at him with frightened eyes. A sudden chill tingled from finger to toe. Was this how he would receive the secret that had made a song in her heart for the last months—the glad beautiful thing that was coming to her? "A complication he could not stand."

She had borne cheerfully their poverty, the cares that fretted life, fruitless ambition, even disillusion; but at the words the mother instinct for the protection of her child flamed up in her, scorching her love for Dunstane.

* * * * *

At Cambridge Dunstane had donned that enthusiasm for humanity which had been the fashion in his set, and which, like the cut of their coats, marked the men of a certain year.

The support given by his college to their University Settlement in the East-end was warm and generous; and it was the ambition of his friends to serve an apprenticeship in it, and solve

the terrible problems of the working man. In the mean while they made many pretty and fanciful solutions on paper, combining the conservatism of 'Varsity economics with the extreme remedies of Marx and his followers.

At first Dunstane had given only a superficial interest to these things, but finally he had been bitten by the earnestness round him. But the two systems clashed discordant notes in his brain, and in the effort to harmonize them the idea of the New In a search for unity, first Religion was born. in the social philosophy of the century, and then gradually further and further back in the thought of all the ages, Dunstane found himself launched on a sea of speculation. He could only save himself from intellectual shipwreck by trusting himself to the planks of the book he was now He looked fondly at his pile of notes as they lay on the table in the sitting-room. The title-page was before him, and he lifted it, revealing the heading of a blank sheet: "Chapter I. The Influence of Confucius on the Social Ouestions of his Day."

Something like a groan escaped him. He felt so empty of Confucius. "Ah, my notes!" he muttered. "What was it I read in the Museum last week? I have it here, I know."

He fumbled among his papers, turning them over with those long artistic fingers of his.

- "The Position of Women among the Jews," caught his eye.
- "That is the tenth chapter; I might begin there this morning... or the Introduction; J am in vein for that."
- "Introductory Remarks," he printed on a clean sheet of paper. He balanced his pen a moment, then wrote rapidly:—
- "When and where did the social question begin? In the middle of the present century, a superficial observer might be tempted to answer. Rather, let us say it was initiated by the angel with the flaming sword who guarded the entrance to Eden. It began with the tilling of the soil in the sweat of the brow; with the struggle of man to supply his needs from the untutored forces of the universe.
- "Every one knows the graphic account of the conflict between the agricultural and the pastoral interests, given under the symbols of Cain and Abel. And it remains for all time,—that primæval type of savage warfare that is even now—and now more than in all time—waking the world with its cries. Here in our streets are its victims; the underfed baby, the sickly child, the

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overworked lad, the hopeless casual, the broken man, the weary mother. The history of the conflict of interests is the history of the world. It is not possible to deal exhaustively with the manifestations of this spirit in the periods of which we have a record. In this book I can touch it only very superficially, and with regard to those nations only who have left the most enduring marks on their age. The past attracts us by its mystery and by its simplicity; the present holds us by its bewildering complexity, its nearness, by the crying need of it for solution. What is the key which shall unlock the puzzle?"

Dunstane propped his head on his hands and meditated. Was there indeed any key? Had not greater, wiser, stronger men than he spent their lives in vain over that riddle? Could human intelligence grapple with it, wrest the answer from it? A traitor consciousness answered, "No, confess the truth, there is no answer."

He threw back his head impatiently. This would never do. His book must be written, and it must contain an answer; yes, the answer. He began again, writing very quickly:—

"Let us be brave; let us acknowledge we cannot invent a key. But we can find one where

we found the problem,-in the history of the world.

"Side by side with the picture of the deadly strife of man with man, driven on by needs and wants and the desire to possess, there emerges to the eye of the seeker another power, universal too, though faint sometimes and overcome by the violence of the other. It is the power of brotherhood; of love, that instead of taking gives, instead of fighting yields; that keeps nothing, wants nothing; -and so has all."

He paused and looked triumphantly at Priscilla, who was at her bureau writing. Her face was troubled, her eyes were vague. She was in the throes of composition.

"Let me read you what I have written, Priscilla," said Dunstane, and without waiting for an answer he read aloud from the sheets he had covered.

Priscilla listened sympathetically, though he had dispersed the ideas gathering round her plot. Her voice was enthusiastic enough when he had rounded his last period.

- "It is very beautiful, dear. But I wonder how you will go on." He leaned his head back and looked at her with a patronising air.
 - "It is quite simple. I'll go on to show how 62

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the brotherhood of man will outgrow the primary instinct of love and develop the wider vision of faith and hope—of faith in the ideal, of hope for the future."

"But won't that contradict what you have just said?" Priscilla asked, knitting her brows. "I thought you would keep the old order, and give love the highest place."

He smiled forgivingly. "Ah, the feminine mind was never logical. What foolish fiction have you been dignifying with the name of literature this morning?"

- "I have written nothing," she said ruefully.
 "I lost my plot. Oh, Dunstane dear, let me talk it over with you. I am sure you can help me."
- "Dear child, you can scarcely wish to divert my thoughts from serious work to your little attempts... It doesn't really matter much whether you get a plot or not, does it?"

Priscilla's heart swelled. She looked at him amazed. Then she rose quickly, pushed her chair aside, and dashed out of the flat and upstairs to Miss Cardrew.

She opened the door without knocking, and entered the room that was the little spinster's home.

There was a quaint resemblance between Miss Cardrew and her room, which was neat and bare and old-fashioned. A bunch of pampasgrass on the marble mantelpiece was comically like the white front that nodded over the spinster's polished forehead. And was not the lark singing in the window a presentment of the happy spirit that looked from Miss Cardrew's eye? A recess held the bed and those intimacies of the toilet whose existence Miss Cardrew would not for the world have acknowledged.

When the curtains were drawn across the recess she ignored, even in thought, its presence; looking upon the apartment as a study, and the desk under the window its only raison d'être. Besides the desk, strewn with odd sheets of newspaper preserved from the spinster's correspondence, there was very little solid furniture in the room. It was carpeted with light matting, chaste but cold; and a cluster of Japanese fans on the buff paper supplied its only colour. A small oak chest in one corner held Miss Cardrew's wardrobe; and a larger one, being opened, revealed kettles, dustpans, and brooms.

To their owner these chests were articles of bijouterie and vertu; with their contents she did not concern herself except in private. These little economies of sentiment were dear and lovable to Priscilla; and she gratified Cardie by aiding her delicate pretences. But to-day she did not stop to think of them.

"Cardie dear, I can't work; and I have to finish a short story by this evening. Have you a plot to give me?"

The spinster pushed her manuscript aside, and looked cheerfully at the flash of brilliant colour that had suddenly brightened her room.

- "My dear, there's a plot in every flat in the Buildings."
- "There isn't one in our flat, Cardie," Priscilla said wearily, seating herself by the desk. "Such a humdrum life as we are leading!... Imagine husband and wife so absorbed in their own interests that they can't spare thought for each other. Dunstane and I have not been married six months, yet already marriage tastes like ginger-beer with the cork out."

Miss Cardrew laughed gently.

- "My dear Priscilla, your home is one of the most interesting I know. Indeed your pretty love story has supplied me with a fascinating plot. I am working it into a one-volume novel. It is nearly finished, my dear."
 - "Cardie, you bad little thing! You have

been hunting romance all the time you pretended to be interested in Dunstane and me."

The little spinster blushed, but did not accept the charge.

- "No, no, my dear. Indeed you mistake, Priscilla. It quite suddenly occurred to me that there were all the elements of a charming romance in your life, and I used it. I thought you would not mind."
- "I suppose it is a good situation," said Priscilla thoughtfully. "Our life lends itself delightfully to comedy... How did you work it out, Cardie?"
- "It began with comedy, Priscilla; but I regret to say the story has taken the bit in its teeth and run away. It is now galloping towards tragedy—quite against my own will, my dear."
- "Don't apologise, Cardie; the development is quite natural. I suppose the tragedy lies in one of us discovering that the marriage has been a mistake, and there is no love in it."
- "My dear Priscilla, I have not attempted the impossible," said Miss Cardrew politely. "No, my dear, the tragedy will take place when your dear husband is removed from you by a terrible accident. I dread the end of the story. I shall not finish it without tears."



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There were tears in her voice as it was, but Priscilla was not touched.

"I wonder how I should feel if Dunstane were to die," she said casually.

Miss Cardrew shuddered.

"My dear, I can't bear to hear you talk of it so calmly. The very idea of it is terrible in fiction. And in real life it would be too tragic."

She broke off with a sob, but Priscilla took no notice of her emotion.

"There is more real tragedy in an unhappy marriage," she maintained. "There is nothing very horrible in death; the terrible thing would be life together without love."

She rested her face on her clasped hands, and her eyes stared darkly into the future. In their depths was a look that made Miss Cardrew uncomfortable.

"It was wrong of me to associate tragedy of any sort with your happy life," she quavered.

Priscilla woke from her dreams with an alertness that dispersed the spinster's fears.

"I was thinking of another tragedy going on in the Buildings," she said. "Cardie dear, can you hear the perpetual tapping of the man who makes coffins in the basement?"

"My dear Priscilla, I beg you not to allude

to it. I never even think of it; it makes me nervous."

Miss Cardrew shrank back with a shiver.

- "Yes," said Priscilla, "it is horrible for us who are strong and well to hear it; but think what it must be to that poor girl who is dying upstairs! She has been lying there listening to it for six months. She told me she knew the size of the coffin by the number of nails they put into it... And she wonders every day if they are making hers.
- "Oh," she went on passionately, "it is a cruel, cruel thing to be poor, so that you have to lie listening to nails being driven into your own coffin. That is a real tragedy."
- "There are many such tragedies here, my dear," said Miss Cardrew softly. "There is the little old maid, Miss Joyce. She has been embroidering wedding-veils for fifty years—a whole half-century! Think of all the happiness she has helped to make, and it has never come near her."
- "Life is a pitiful thing!" Priscilla said bitterly. "Cardie dear, I think you are happier than most women."
- "I am very happy," said Miss Cardrew meekly.
 "My writing is a great solace to me. I could

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wish to be privileged to write a really good novel."

- "I hope you will," said the girl heartily. "I mean to write a great book before I die. The thing is to be dominated by the force that makes alive..."
 - " Priscilla, I do not quite follow you."
- "It is rather difficult to explain what I mean," said Priscilla; "but I have felt it a long time. Everything that has life comes from the mingling of two forces; and I believe that thoughts and words and books become alive in just the same way. When I yield my mind, some force that is not me takes possession of it, and the story that comes is a living thing. When I write without that possession my work has form, but no life—like an egg without the vital germ."
 - "My dear, you startle me!"
- "Long ago people called it inspiration," Priscilla went on; "but I think of it as a marriage of the mind. And your plot runs away, Cardie dear, because the other power has given it life."
- "Priscilla, my dear, it seems to me a very dangerous theory, and it takes away half one's responsibility."
- "It seems to me a beautiful theory," said Priscilla joyfully; "Therefore also that holy

thing which shall be born of thee...'" She stooped suddenly and kissed Miss Cardrew.

"Good-bye, Cardie dear; you have given me many plots."

There was a new gravity in her eyes when she returned to the sitting-room, where Dunstane was still bending over his "Introduction."

She went to the bureau, and seating herself wrote busily. Dunstane watched her with an amused tolerance, and was about to speak when the door was thrown open and Mrs. Markham came in.

As she saw the woman's face Priscilla ran to her.

"Oh, what is it? What has happened?"

Mrs. Markham could not find her voice. Lips and eyelids were twitching, but she could not speak. Suddenly she threw her shawl open and gripped Priscilla's arm, drawing her gaze down to the burden under the shawl.

Seeing what it was, Priscilla grew deadly pale and began to tremble.

"Dead! Your dear little baby!" she whispered. "Oh, my dear! Come and sit down and tell me what has happened."

But Dunstane interposed before Mrs. Mark-

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ham could take the chair towards which Priscilla led her.

- "Had you not better have your talk in the kitchen, my darling?"
- "Dunstane," said Priscilla, her voice breaking, "Mrs. Markham's little baby is dead."
- "Oh well, oh well," he said impatiently. "I dare say it is the best thing that could happen to it... But I can't write while you are making a scene."

Priscilla flashed an indignant glance at him; then she threw her arm round Mrs. Markham and drew her into the kitchen. But when she saw the mother's dumb despair and the child lying dead on her arm, she covered her face with her hands and turned away shaking.

At last Mrs. Markham spoke.

- "I don't want as you should take on so, Mrs. Momerie. I didn't hought to ha' let you see her, but I am that shook, and I don't know where to turn . . ."
- "It is so hard," said Priscilla hoarsely. "Oh you poor, poor soul, I am so sorry for you! Baby was quite well...only this morning..."
- "She was, bless her little heart! But I had to go to my work; and when I come back she laid in her cradle that strange I knowed summat

were wrong. I just whipped her up and run with her to Dr. Barker's. He looked at me that feeling. 'Child's dead, Mrs. Markham; been dead these two hours,' says he. And I thought I'd come and tell you, and . . . "

She broke off sobbing. Priscilla was crying too. It seemed to her that there was a tragedy in every life in the Buildings.

CHAPTER VI.

"A MERRY HEART GOES ALL THE WAY."

MISS CARDREW sat on the Chesterfield and levelled her spectacles at each separate feature of Priscilla's face. Her feet dangled six inches from the ground as she sat on the sofa. She did not want a footstool, she explained to Priscilla, except when Mr. Momerie was at home. In a gentleman's presence a woman should be a creature without legs. Even a hen has the decency to conceal one of hers when possible.

- "Only when she is asleep and doesn't know what she is doing, Cardie dear."
- "Ah, Priscilla, Priscilla, these new ideas will be your ruin."

Miss Cardrew shook her head, and her white hair detached itself from her forehead, shaking also. Priscilla remembered that she had had her suspicions of that front ten years ago—only then it was brown.

- "The ideas are not new," Priscilla mentioned, at least not newer than the hen."
- "But it is so modern to express them. To be sure you are a married woman."
- "Yes, I suppose I am, though I don't see that it makes me less modern. I shall be pleased to chaperon you, Cardie dear, any time you should need such a discipline," she added, twinkling.
- "Thank you, my dear; I am sure I have stayed at home many times because I needed one. It is an ironical inversion of our former positions, but then everybody looking at us will take me for the chaperon, so it will be all right."
- "Why should a person that looks like a chaperon need a chaperon?" Priscilla asked.
- "Ah, my dear, you are so very direct. It is in order to allow marriage some privileges. But you always scorned conventions. That is why you married Mr. Momerie and came to live here."
 - "I came because you lived here."

Miss Cardrew sat bolt upright, and a pleased look snapped in her bright little eyes.

- "Really, my dear, really?"
- "To be sure," said Priscilla, heartily; "old friends don't grow on every gooseberry bush."
 - "Some do, my dear. And you really came

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to live near me? But you have made so many friends already. Wherever I go it is Mrs. Momerie this and Mrs. Momerie that. Last night Mr. Malden called on me. We talked of you for an hour, yes, we did."

"That young man is rather interesting," said Priscilla, thoughtfully. "Did I ever tell you he made three sketches of me after seeing me once? He seemed awfully ashamed of himself when I found it out, but I told him I thought him very clever; and I have taken an interest in him ever since."

"You like him, then, my dear?"

"Ye—s," said Priscilla, with reservation in her voice. "That is to say, I like his Bohemian At Homes; and I like his kittens—six of them, the dearest possible——"

"My dear, you were always a baby over young things. Mrs. Markham was telling me how good you were to her when she lost her baby. And I told her it was a blessing the little creature was taken to another world."

"How could you!" Priscilla cried passionately. "The little thing! the dear little thing! I shall never, never forget the sight of that little white dead baby! It would have lived if its mother hadn't had to go to that poisonous factory. A

week after it was born! Cardie, dear, think of that poor woman after all she had gone through...!"

"My dear Priscilla, you must excuse me... it is not as if I were married."

Miss Cardrew hung her head. She looked all the conventions and a moral. Priscilla changed the subject.

- "I am rather bothered about Dunstane. This idleness is so bad for him."
- "Idleness, my dear! is that what you call his valuable work? I cannot too greatly admire the industry with which he studies. You have forgotten the long hours he spends at the Museum."
- "No," said Priscilla, drily, "I have not forgotten."
- "Your dear husband gave us a treat at Mr. Malden's evening last week. He talked—most eloquently, wonderfully. You should have seen the young men listen. No one wanted to stir—I was in tears—the New Religion. We all felt that a prophet was among us, a priest of a new dispensation....Yes, he told us of his work. None of us moved.....It was after midnight before we could tear ourselves away."
- "Dunstane talks well," said Priscilla. "But his book is not yet begun—and we have to live.

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It would be better if he could teach an hour or two a day."

- "Throw away his talents? And you have his annuity—he told me about it."
- "It pays the rent and gives us ten shillings a week to live on."

Little by little Miss Cardrew heard the story. At the end she gazed wonderingly at Priscilla's face—a sky with one cloud.

"My dear, how can you be so cheerful—only ten shillings a week to depend on?"

Priscilla was sitting on the hassock beside the sofa. She laid her head on Miss Cardrew's knee.

"Dunstane is kind and affectionate," she said. "And I think he is fond of me. It is nice to be of use to him. I was no use to any one till I married. When he can find work things won't be difficult. They are rather hard now, but I have to be bright for my baby's sake," she ended with a whisper. "I can't give her much, but she shall have a merry heart to go through life with."

The fingers stroking Priscilla's hair trembled. The little spinster slipped down beside Priscilla, her thin, old face eager and happy; and the two women laughed and wept over the coming of the

baby to whom its mother could give nothing but a merry heart.

- "I couldn't tell Dunstane," Priscilla said by and by. "I am afraid it will vex him. And I wanted to tell somebody."
- "But, my dear, there are so many mothers in the Buildings."
- "They don't seem to understand—they don't seem to feel what a wonderful, beautiful thing it is. Poor souls, they miss the joy, when it means a harder life for everybody."
- "It wasn't right to keep it to yourself, dear. And you have other friends."
- "Yes, there is Gertrude Tennant. But she would rather sing in the Albert Hall once than have twenty children."
- "I should think so indeed!" murmured Miss Cardrew.
- "And," Priscilla went on dreamily, "there was some one else I could have told. I know he would have understood, only——"

The little spinster sat up stiffly, waiting for the end of the sentence. "Only it did not seem fair to Dunstane," Priscilla finished, still with the dream in her eyes.

Miss Cardrew's bones relaxed, she bent forward and kissed the girl.

"A MERRY HEART GOES ALL THE WAY."

"Follow your heart, Priscilla, always. You can trust it to guide you right, my dear."

The twine carpet was not an attractive seat, but she bore it for Priscilla's sake. She had the idea she had gathered the girl to her bosom. An observer would have said it was Priscilla that enfolded the little figure. Presently Priscilla noticed that Miss Cardrew's white front had slipped aside, showing some streaks of faded brown hair. She put it straight with tender fingers, and did not laugh.

- "Thank you, my dear. I think, Priscilla, your hair will never be white. I can read success before you—and your dear husband's genius."
- "I can't see it at present, Cardie; but I mean to make my life a success."

Her voice rang; the light in her eyes grew strong and steadfast.

- "And you will, dear. Youth, beauty, health, love, ability—with all these you cannot fail."
- "I shall not fail," said Priscilla. "And I shall have my little baby."

Voice and eyes softened.

- "I never had any of your advantages, my dear Priscilla—I was born old."
- "You are not old yet, Cardie dear. Why do you wear that white front? your hair is not grey."

- "No, my dear; but I wished to make some change, and that seemed an appropriate one when I lost all."
 - "All?" Priscilla echoed.
- "After I left Frodsham, I had my story, though it seemed so unlikely. You know what love is, child—if you lost it."

The voice quavered and failed, but the words pricked Mrs. Momerie's thoughts into a gallop. In a little while Miss Cardrew went on.

"It would not have been so hard if I had had the right to mourn him; he had endeared himself to me, but he died before—before... The lark was his, you know."

Priscilla's fingers tightened on the chilly hand in hers.

- "It made such a difference to my life, my dear. . . . When I came back I thought every one must observe the change in me. I thought my hair would be grey. . . . But everything was the same—nothing was changed. . . . And it didn't seem right to him. . . . After that I got the white front. . . ."
- "But, Cardie—" Priscilla choked over the tears in her laugh.
- "Yes, Priscilla, I know what you would say. I could not expect grey hairs on the brown front.

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I didn't; but there were none anywhere else. My own hair came out a little—it always falls in spring and autumn."

"You poor little thing! You poor little thing!" said Priscilla, kissing her. "And after that what did you do?"

"I found the change in my stories, my dear. You would not have thought it, but they sold better after I got the white front—after I lost . . . The lark's song seemed to get into them."

"Yes, I know," said Priscilla softly.

CHAPTER VII.

A LAST MISFORTUNE.

PRISCILLA made a very wry face when she saw the parcel containing her novel. She had expected it, after receiving a note from Messrs. Snoad and Follows saying that its publication would spoil the reputation she had made by "A Parish Romance." They advised her to set to work on a story more on the lines of her first.

She had laughed bitterly as she read the note. She had accomplished less even than Dunstane, with whom she had begun to feel impatient. His work at least was not stamped failure.

There was no cheque then to help them over the coming months. The past months' harvest was worthless. The future? Ah! yes, that promised something still.

The dismay passed from her face; her nerves grew steady. Reputation? She did not care a

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snap for it! What she needed was money—money with which to conjure—money that would line the nest for her little bird.

She started up, once more hopeful. She would go to the publishers and tell them she was willing to sell her fame for money.

She hurried on her out-door things. She must get away before Dunstane came in. She could not meet his questions and give him only these addled eggs on which hope had sat uselessly brooding for five months. She could not listen to his higher philosophy. A discourse on failure would madden her. She could hear him mouthing it—

"How far high failure overleaps the bounds of low success . . ."

No, she must get away at once.

At that time of day the Buildings were practically deserted, but a child, looking top-heavy under the weight of a baby, smiled at her as she passed. Priscilla carried the bundle down and restored it on the doorstep where Jimmy Gibson sat, snatching what summer he could from the strip of sky.

- "Wish me luck, Jimmy," Priscilla cried gaily, kissing him.
 - "Mother's gone to a fun'ral," said Jimmy,

wiping off the kiss with his sleeve. "She's agoin' to bring me a bit of the cyke."

Priscilla smiled.

"I hope I shall bring back a slice of cake from my funeral." Her mouth puckered over the idea; it touched the Euston Road whimsically.

She swung along, her eyes keen for what she saw, the traffic netting pavement and pavement in noisy meshes; the stations, King's Cross and St. Pancras. They reminded her of churches, set down in sordid London to tell of a better life beyond—a life of sky and air and rest, away from the turmoil. The shriek of the trains was the gospel of the better country.

Priscilla reined in her thoughts. They signalled discontent, though it was scarcely four months since she had been more than content with the city. But in four months many things may happen. Mrs. Markham's baby had died, the summer had come, bringing not sun but festering heat to the Buildings.

The atmosphere hinted unpleasantly of the unwashed. The people she passed looked poorer and dirtier than ever in the sunlight.

But she was very happy this morning. She longed to stop and speak to everybody, the

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straining horses, the folk, the children, the sadeyed dogs.

An organ was grinding out the last popular tune; two ragged little girls were dancing to it, keenly alive to the admiration of the crowd looking on. Priscilla stopped too, enjoying the children's tattered triumph. She would have liked to dance with them. The organ was lavish in runs and variations. In a basket close to the merry jar a mournful baby sucked its thumb.

Priscilla saw it delightedly. She purred and cooed to the child, who did not respond. But into the face of the woman grinding the organ there came a gleam of life, and her eyes brightened as she watched.

Priscilla slipped into the baby's hand the penny that was to have paid her 'bus fare home again. What did it matter? In an hour she would be a rich woman.

At the corner of Tottenham-court Road she took an omnibus going to Charing Cross. The colour, yellow, set her teeth on edge; but to-day she could afford to think gaily of her first novel.

Two well-dressed women who had been shopping at Shoolbred's got into the 'bus. They looked enviously at her bright face. Either of

them would have given everything she possessed to have been the pretty girl with whom life went so cheerily.

She alighted at St. Martin's Church and went into the Strand, avoiding the short cut of the Lowther Arcade. She knew herself too well to go voluntarily into that yawning jaw of tempta-So long as she had sixpence in her pocket she could not have passed the toys without buying one for some child of her acquaintance. Strand was gaver than the Euston Road. of the men here wore frock coats and irreproachable boots, gaiters too; --- a buttonhole. Not the buttonhole of Piccadilly; as a rule the Malmaison carnation is not "something in the City." The flower girls at the station gates had baskets sparely filled. Business was not brisk. newspaper woman under the post office drove a better trade.

Priscilla walked past them and turned up Bedford Street in search of Messrs. Snoad and Follows. An air of smug prosperity, due to the publishing houses in it, hung about this street. Even the name at the street corner had a flourishing literary air.

Priscilla's heart was beating joyously, deepening the colour in her cheeks; and her run up the

stairs to the floor on which she would find her publishers gave her a look of eager youth.

The boy did not know if Mr. Snoad was in. What name, please?

Priscilla gave him her card. He fingered it, and decided that Mr. Snoad was in.

Mrs. Dunstane Momerie commanded a certain respect.

"What is she like?" said Mr. Snoad, weighing Priscilla's card on the balance of his finger-tips. Yes, it was quite the right thing.

He was a small man, fair and faultless in appearance.

- "Young, sir, and pretty and larkish; not like a married lady."
- "Show her in, sir. What are you wasting your time for, sir, forming opinions?"

Mr. Snoad smoothed down his moustache, hitched up his collar, glanced at his hands.

When Priscilla came in she found him occupied with figures. He finished his line of cyphers, then rose apologising, indicated the chair beside his desk, and analysed the weather. She agreed with him that it was a warm day, and he found it pleasant to meet her confiding eyes.

"Country," he said to himself, and continued the conversation suggested by his figures.

Priscilla hopped with him from topic to topic, a good second. Was she from the country after all? When she was quite ready Mr. Snoad was astonished to find himself perched on the subject of the rejected manuscript. He glanced at his watch, and exclaimed: "Would Mrs. Momerie excuse him? He had an appointment at twelve and must run; but his partner, Mr. Follows ... Might he trouble her to step into the next room? Mr. Follows would tell her everything she wanted to know. They had had a long talk before returning the story."

Mr. Follows rose, smiling palely at Mrs. Momerie's name. It was an understood thing that Mr. Snoad entertained young and interesting authors; to Mr. Follows fell the duty of disillusioning them.

They did not need the buffer of the weather to dull the clash of personalities; this was a business interview. Priscilla controlled her gaiety.

"I am sorry we could not make you an offer for your second book," said Mr. Follows pleasantly. "Your first was so successful; it is a pity to spoil the effect by publishing an inferior work."

"But this book is infinitely superior to the first," said Priscilla bluntly.

- "Our reader does not think so."
- "Oh, but I know! I was a girl when I wrote 'A Parish Romance'—I knew nothing about life or art or authorship."
- "You managed to write a story that people wanted to read."
- "But this book is different. I have worked at it . . . It is not so crude; there is nothing unpleasant."
 - "It is very chaste indeed."
 - "Then what is wrong?"
- "You see, my dear Mrs. Momerie, in your first book the subject—but it is impossible for me to go into that with a lady."
- "If I can write it I can talk about it," said Priscilla.
- "The fact is, it was the subject that sold 'A Parish Romance,' not the art. There was no literary merit whatever in it."
 - "None?" she cried blankly.
 - " Very little."
 - "Then why did you publish it?"
 - "It is the sort of thing that commands a sale."
- "Literary pâté de foie gras. I think I understand."

He glanced away from her face; it was pitiful to see the light dying out of it.

Priscilla was thinking—"Then Dunstane was wrong; his criticism was worthless."

She rose wearily. "I had come to tell you that I cared more for money just now than for fame. But it seems I have not even fame to barter."

Mr. Follows rose and threw a smile to the drowning author.

"You must give us another story like the first."

She flung out her hand with a passionate gesture.

"I pray that I may die before I do that!"

She turned away from him and walked out of the room with feet that were as heavy as her heart. The light had failed, and, going, it left her face grey and her eyes wide and blank. Dunstane's estimate of her book had been false; but it was not this that had all at once made the world empty for her. A sharp knowledge had cut through her life like a blade, severing past from present.

In the past were Dunstane and his appreciation of her work, the glamour and glory of the dream. In the present were Dunstane and her knowledge of him, the shock of a rough awakening.

For the first time she saw clearly her fatal mistake. She had been as little able to estimate the real man as he to pass judgment on the merit of her novel.

She was confronted by the barrier she had herself set up in her life; and she knew too late that happiness was on the other side the fence.

She dragged her feet along the pavement. Leaving behind her Charing Cross and the busy Strand, she plunged into the squalor of Covent Garden. It was the shortest way home, even if it led her through unlovely byways.

She passed idle women who glanced at her; and one mocked her weary air; and one, more miserable than herself, looked after her pityingly.

Two little girls played with some withered flowers, sitting on the edge of the pavement. Priscilla's eyes struck a keen solemnity into their fun. She was so sorry for them, because one day they would be women knowing the bitter anguish of womanhood, and the agony of love awakened perhaps too late.

"Poor little mites!" she thought. "But maybe the faded flowers will still satisfy them."

She passed on, and the children wondered why she had looked so pityingly at them.

She did not notice that she had missed her

way till she found herself again at St. Martin's Church.

A yellow omnibus stood waiting to start for the Euston Road, but, tired though she was, she could not afford to ride. She had spent her last penny.

Ah, how tired she was! The church door stood open; she would go in and rest before she started on the walk home. Inside the church it was dark and cool and restful. Matins were being read, the curate's voice clanging across empty pews. When she became accustomed to the darkness she saw that one old woman formed the congregation.

She knelt down also, resting her head on her hands, and the words of the Benediction dropped one by one deep into the silence.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you all, evermore. Amen."

She heard the steps of the curate clatter on the paved floor in his march to the vestry; but she did not move. She was kneeling, saying over and over half consciously,—"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God; the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God."

The words were part of the dimness and the quiet, and they offered a pillow on which her tired heart could rest. They were like a posy of fresh flowers for her weary senses. They carried her back to the church at Frodsham; and again she knelt in the old pew, a happy girl, and rose up in faith and hope.

But a shuffling step came along the aisle, and a voice in her ear brought her back to the present.

"I'm agoing to close the church now," said the woman who had represented the congregation.

Priscilla rose slowly. It was hard to go from these gentle influences into the struggle that was waiting outside for her.

Yet when she came out into the glare, life had taken on a new aspect. Everything seemed bright. The fountains in the square rioted in sunshine; the hansom bells jingled pleasantly of hope. She stepped out heartily towards the Euston Road.

Jimmy was sitting on the doorstep crying. He held up a streaky face to Priscilla.

"Mother's been to the fun'ral, and she's 'ome and she ain't brought no cyke."

- "Nor have I, Jimmy," said Mrs. Momerie cheerfully. "I am home from my funeral, and no cake either. But never mind. As soon as I have a cake you shall share it with me."
 - "I don't want to 'ave it in your 'ouse."
 - "Oh, Jimmy, why?"
- "Because I just 'ates your 'usband. He ain't a good 'un like Mr. Malden."

Priscilla was whiter than usual, and the colour mounted soon to her face.

- "Has Mr. Momerie come in, Jimmy?"
- "Yes; he were atalkin' to mother. She telled im he 'adn't hought to let you run about so much."

Priscilla hurried upstairs. She gained breath when she found that Dunstane was not in the sitting-room.

A letter with the Frodsham postmark lay on the table. She snatched it up. It was only to say that Betsy Huggins was dead, and what would Miss Priscilla like to have them do with the wheel-chair?

She threw it down wearily.

There was a shuffle outside and Dunstane came in, trailing his leg. He stood in the middle of the room.

Still smarting from his criticism that had misled

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her, Priscilla reflected that his attitude was melodramatic.

- "Priscilla, is it true?"
- "Yes, dear, it is quite true," she answered, an exaggerated breeziness in her voice. "My new book has no literary merit, and it is not improper enough for publication. Never mind, I must try something else. What sort of luck have you had?"

He leaned heavily against the table.

- "I don't know what you are talking about. The evasion is not like yourself. Tell me if it is true. . . ."
 - "Is what true, Dunstane dear?"
- "What that woman has been telling me. Isn't it hard enough to live without—without... Why should this last misfortune come upon us?"

She stared at him, not understanding what he meant. Then a hot colour flamed in her face. Her figure straightened. She looked proudly at him.

"It is quite true that some day—some day..."

The defiant ring with which she had begun softened to silence.

Dunstane dragged himself to a chair and fell forward on the table, his head on his hands.

"Oh, my God! could we not have been spared this?"

He was a pitiful figure, a bladder pricked that had collapsed, but Priscilla had no tenderness for him. She stood straight and cold, looking at him with hard, uncomprehending eyes that did not bridge the gulf between them. He could be gay over their poverty—that touched him lightly. His optimism leaped over every difficulty; his hopefulness shone in darkest places. But this that held all the happiness of the world for her, this made him miserable. He reproached God for sending them the sweetest gift of life. It was hard for her to forgive him.

At last a gentler mood came to her. She went forward and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Dear, you are so tired. Come and lie on the sofa and let me get you some lunch."

He lifted his hat. For the first time she saw him dispirited.

"No, I must go out again. I refused a post just now—usher in a preparatory school; all my time and a miserable thirty shillings a week."

Priscilla's eyes snapped greedily.

"Thirty shillings a week! And you refused it!"

He turned on her.

"Priscilla, would you barter my future for a mess of pottage?"

"Yes, I would! I would! We are starving on ten shillings; two pounds would keep us, and help me... It would mean so much to us just now, Dunstane," she added wistfully.

"I am going back to accept it," he said dully.
"I must sacrifice everything—my future, my great work—to this unhappy child."

"Wait till you have had lunch," said Priscilla coldly.

Her heart had melted towards him, but it froze again at his last words.

"I have no time and no heart for food," he said.

But when he tried to rise his limbs slipped, and, groaning, he fell to the floor.

The face he held up to her was ghastly, but he would not let her lift him.

"No, no, my darling; I must take care of you now. Wait a bit; I shall soon..."

She was on her knees beside him, and his head dropped back on her arm.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

GERTRUDE TENNANT had just finished her morning's practice. Her face was flushed and triumphant. Her voice had taken a semitone higher than ever before. She thought of it breathlessly; her future trembled on semitones. Then her face clouded, and a hard despair was in her eyes.

"But what is the use now? It is nothing to him whether I fail or succeed. He has been quite different since she came—cold and reserved. He scarcely speaks to me now. If she were not so good and sweet!... But it is not her fault... She can't help people loving her."

Her face had a pathetic droop—it looked depressed and softer than it had done when she called first on Priscilla. Even her frock looked depressed—she had lost the jaunty air of prosperity that sits on the starched shirt and smart coat of the tailor-made woman. Her blouse was

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limp. The coat and skirt, like Gertrude, had seen better days. And yet Madame Schombert's verdict had been favourable—she had predicted a brilliant future for that pliant voice. "But I would give it all up for his love," Gertrude said to herself every day.

He had loved her last summer; but that was before Priscilla came. A gay and laughing Priscilla that made pets of the dirty babies and friends of the poor people, and clanged the bell of a loving heart so persistently and loudly that everybody in the Buildings came to worship, Malden among them—even Gertrude herself.

There was a sudden sharp knock, and the hall door opened.

"Miss Tennant-"

It was Malden's voice. The poor little girl could not keep the happiness from her face.

"Come in!" she called, going forward to meet him. He was a big man; the short coat broadened his shoulders. It was absurd to see the helplessness in his manner. There was no gaiety on his face either. He was pale and anxious. The look he gave Gertrude was impersonal, and the colour faded from her cheeks.

"I wish you would go down and see if any-



thing is wrong with Mrs. Momerie," he said; "someone ought to go and see to her."

- "Is anything wrong?" she said distantly.
- "I am afraid so—I heard someone groaning. There was a fall, and everything has been quiet since."

Gertrude sprang to the door; then she stopped.

- "Why didn't you go for Miss Cardrew?"
- "I did. She is out."
- "Mrs. Gibson?"
- "Out, too. Don't waste time. Come-"

She ran down the steps before him, turned the handle of Priscilla's door, knocked, and went in.

In a minute she came back to Malden waiting outside. "Mr. Momerie has fainted. Will you come in?"

The relief on Malden's face sent a pang to Gertrude's heart—he was suddenly a man again. She could imagine him rubbing his hands as he followed her into the room. Dunstane was lying on the floor, Priscilla bathing his head. "He must have walked too far," she explained. "Do you think we could lift him onto the sofa?"

"I feel as if I should never move again," said Dunstane.

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"Nonsense, man!" said Malden, "you'll be all right in a minute. Let me help you up, Mrs. Momerie. There, that is better. Now you sit down, and leave me to manage your husband."

His cheery voice put buttresses round Priscilla. She leaned on his strength. After all, things were not hopeless. Gertrude helping Malden, Dunstane was lifted on to the sofa. Miss Tennant turned to Priscilla in her gentlest manner. "Mr. Momerie is in good hands. Won't you come and lie down? You must have had a shock."

Priscilla pulled herself together, her lips smiling bravely. "Lie down? No indeed; I am going to get my husband some food. He has had nothing since breakfast."

Malden went out and returned immediately with a luncheon-tray.

"I was just going to have my lunch; they always send enough for half a dozen. You can depend on me to see to your husband, Mrs. Momerie. Take her off, Miss Tennant; I know I can trust you."

Priscilla laughed at his dictatorship, but she was glad to escape into the bedroom. She was growing sick and faint.

Gertrude took hat and cloak from her, loosened her dress, and made her lie down on

one of the two little beds while she made a cup of tea. "How kind everybody is—Mr. Malden and you! Would you mind asking if Dunstane has eaten anything?"

Gertrude met Malden in the hall. He laid his finger on his lips and drew her into the kitchen.

- "How is Mrs. Momerie now?"
- "Better. You need not look as if the world were coming to an end." She smiled into his grave face.
- "I am afraid it is for her, poor girl! Things look awfully bad with Momerie. He can't feel his limbs at all, and his father was paralysed."

The colour left Gertrude's face.

- "How terrible for her!" she said, shocked.
- "She mustn't guess. I am sending for the doctor. Go back and tell her Momerie is my patient, and she is not to bother about him."
 - "What a kind heart you have!"

He smiled, thinking how womanly and sympathetic she was.

"What should I have done without your kind heart, Miss Tennant?"

Gertrude went back to Priscilla, her face on fire. She looked so radiant that Priscilla met her with:—

"I can see you have good news," and was

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content with her answer. She was not sorry to be lying on her little bed away from every one but Gertrude. The girl was very sweet to-day—Priscilla liked her soft step, her soft voice, her soft hands about her. She did not want Dunstane to come in just then. His weakness made her very pitiful and tender towards him. But he had stabbed her to the heart, and the knife still rankled in the wound.

"Poor little woman!" said the doctor kindly. "No, she must not be told for the present. It's a hard case for a young man, but it has been coming on some time, he tells me. And with that hereditary tendency it's quite hopeless. He ought never to have married. She is a fine girl, too. I've met her a good many times nursing my patients—might have done much better. But it is no use telling her now. And she took him for better, for worse."

"Quite hopeless, did you say?" Malden's voice was hoarse, his face strained. He and Dr. Barker were in Priscilla's kitchen discussing the situation. The examination was over. Dunstane had been told that he would be helpless "for a time."

He accepted the verdict cheerfully, and spoke of the discipline of pain and disappointment, impressing the doctor. "Fortunately my book has reached a point where I am independent of the Museum reading-room," he said bravely. "I shall have more quiet for writing, now I am a prisoner." "And I shall not have to teach little cads for thirty shillings a week," was in his mind.

The two men did not give him much sympathy. It was Priscilla who needed it more.

"With all his fondness for her he is a selfish beast," said Malden hotly. "How any man could be satisfied to hang on all these months, living on dreams! His confounded book! She has slaved for him like a charwoman. Look at the place—and all her own hands!"

He kicked the coal in the grate viciously.

- "It has been hanging over him a long time; he would really not be up to much," said the doctor. "Well, he is done for now. What a future before him! Not thirty, and paralysed! And that poor girl chained to him for life!"
- "How she ever married him! What she ever saw in him!" Malden cried furiously.
- "He seems to me a very fine fellow; I like his pluck. He is cultured, too—scholarly, talks well."

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- "He does. And that is all he does. She has thrown herself away."
- "No accounting for what women will do. She will have the child to comfort her, but they'll never have another."

There was a pause that made itself felt. Priscilla stood in the doorway, her eyes appealing to them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BIRD IN THE CAGE.

In the first days of Dunstane's illness Priscilla was like a creature in a cage. She dared not give voice to her trouble. She scarcely dared show her pity and sympathy for him, or dwell on the trouble at all. Suppose she could not give that birthright of a merry heart. The thought was torture to her. She darted from side to side of the bars the trouble had put round her.

Dunstane himself was cheerful enough; it was she who was weighed down by that terrible lifesentence. Nothing depressed her husband but the thought that lent wings to her day. On one subject he was silent, and his silence digged a gulf between them.

She must be up and doing, present and future were in her hands. Dunstane's responsibilities were at an end. She stepped into the place he had never filled. From the bars of the cage her courage went skyward, singing. Heartily she

adapted herself to the new conditions. "For life," knelled in her ears, but she never let Dunstane guess that she knew of the doom passed upon him; and he never spoke of it to her except with that gay optimism she was now learning to dread.

She would have had another medical opinion, but Dr. Barker assured her it was unnecessary. Mrs. Gibson suggested a free hospital. Dunstane asked her, beaming, if she thought he looked like a pauper?

Mrs. Gibson begged his pardon. "But there, you never can tell, appearances is that deceitful."

To Priscilla the outlook was midnight, lighted by one star, and she followed the star. Would it not lead her to the cradle of a little child?

She watched wakeful through the night. "I am like the shepherds tending their sheep," she thought. "Some night the darkness will part; I shall hear the angels. 'Unto you is born . . . '"

Thoughts like these led her by the hand beyond the prison walls into the days that would be light about her.

When she was not attending to Dunstane or the house she was writing. Morning, noon, and night she wielded her pen. It was the sharp

point that kept the wolf at bay. Her dreams of fame were over. Miss Cardrew had introduced her to a market where she could dispose of short sensational stories. They were not literature. The stuff of which they were made could be fashioned by the yard by any person with a fair education and some imagination.

They were not literature, but they did not depend on risky situations for their interest, and they made no assault on morality.

Writing incessantly, Priscilla managed to keep her household together and put away a little fund for the time when she must be idle.

Sometimes Miss Cardrew's prediction of success buzzed about her. She stunned it with her pen, laughing. The mountain-paths of literature were behind her. She was glad to ride her hack along the cobbles of the marketplace.

But while she wrote she took courage. As well as a merry heart she was giving her child the gift that had failed her. The fancy struck sparks from the stones. Her hack sped forward.

Lying on the sofa watching her, Dunstane was surprised to hear her singing as her pen travelled.

"She has no depth," he thought. "How can she face the future and not feel her responsibility?

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Any woman in her position would sober down. She doesn't give it a thought."

He spent most of his time on the sofa. At first he had been a prisoner in the bedroom, but Priscilla's quick wits had altered that. The wheel-chair of old Betsy Huggins, who needed it no longer, now carried Dunstane from bedroom to parlour and back again.

It comforted Priscilla that he was not lonely while she worked; but his presence hindered her writing. His sofa was strewn with papers, the straw with which he would make bricks to build his great work, and he interrupted persistently. What were her pot-boilers compared with his New Religion?

She offered sometimes to read to him. "I have no time to spare for enjoyment," he said, "but I am glad to see you can still be happy."

- "But, Dunstane, what good does it do to mope?"
 - "No one will accuse you of moping, Priscilla."

It sounded like a reproach. She reined in her spirits to the funeral pace. Was it not Dunstane who had the monopoly of high spirits?

But she could not be unhappy. She was earning enough and to spare.

Dunstane was a drag upon flying wheels in

other ways. His presence at home ended Priscilla's babyish joys. No more Jimmy, or rolling pin dolls; no more grimy babies tumbling about the flat; no more ecstasies over stray puppies. Even Malden's kittens were forbidden. Dunstane hated children and animals.

There were always kittens next door. As soon as one batch grew out of babyhood they were replaced by another set. Malden wanted them for models, he said; and a certain shop in Goodge Street, with another in St. Martin's Lane, got into the habit of raising prices at the entry of a good-looking man in a shabby tweed coat.

Priscilla told herself honestly Dunstane's presence did not altogether compensate for these joys; and when she dared she would slink into the studio, gather the kittens in her apron, and speed back to her kitchen to laugh and croon over them till Dunstane's voice brought her back to sense and censure.

At other times, sickened by her stories of high life, she would throw away her pen and fly downstairs to the realism of the Markham children; grubby little creatures to whom Mrs. Momerie was a visitor from fairyland.

To these visits was due a smartening up of the

Markham flat. Mrs. Markham "couldn't abear to see Mrs. Momerie spoiling her good clothes on the dirty floor;" so floor and children tasted soap and water, and it was good for them.

She kept a sick puppy in the kitchen for days, till the miserable little creature's bark of delight at seeing her betrayed her guilt. Dunstane laughed at her; but she had to find another home for her beastie.

There was one subject about which he could not laugh. Her sewing irritated him. He hated to see her blissful eyes, to hear the broken strands of laughter that threaded the hours while she stitched. He lay listening for her gurgles of happiness; they fell upon his impotence with a rattle as of earth upon a coffin.

When she found that her work got upon his nerves, she would leave him to his book, and would go upstairs to Gertrude Tennant, her needle moving the more quickly to the girl's singing.

Gertrude took the sweetest interest in Priscilla's hopes. She had dedicated her own needle to the service of "my little baby." It was pretty to see the two girls together working and dreaming, singing and laughing over their secret. The work rubbed off some of Gertrude's angles,

softening her into an early motherliness. She began to see some beauty in the dirty babies of the Buildings, to dream of something higher than semitones, sweeter than success. It was that summer that she gave up her new hat to send Jimmy Gibson into the country.

There was often a wistful look in her eyes, but she had ceased to be jealous of Priscilla. Malden spent a good deal of his time among the down cushions and art screens. He liked Gertrude's gentler moods; she talked less of her ambitions now, and more of Mrs. Momerie.

* * * *

One cheerless day in December Priscilla burst into Miss Cardrew's room, and all at once the desert blossomed.

Miss Cardrew sat in a flannel dressing-gown that repeated washings had made too short for her. Her front was pushed to one side, her spectacles were low on her nose. She was writing.

At the opening of the door she brushed away a tear and pushed up her spectacles.

"Oh, Cardie dear, 'my heart is like a singing bird'! I am so happy! Put your arms round me! kiss me! hug me!" Priscilla knelt down

THE BIRD IN THE CAGE.

by the dressing-gown to bring her neck within reach of the shrunken sleeves. Miss Cardrew

reach of the shrunken sleeves. Miss Cardrew stood up and did as she was requested.

There was a twinkle in her eye; she mistook it for a tear and brushed it off.

"Are you just up?" Priscilla asked.

Miss Cardrew blushed. "No, my dear, I know I am not in a proper dress. It is a habit I have got into. Certain stories demand certain costumes. This I keep for stories of sentiment. It is getting rather worn."

Priscilla thought of Mrs. Markham's shawl "dashed" by too frequent arrivals of little Markhams.

- "Give me another kiss," she commanded.
- "My dear, you should not have come to me for this," the little spinster quavered. "Your dear husband—I remember how beautifully he spoke the other day on the domestic affections."
- "Dunstane is too busy with his book to be worried," said Priscilla. Her face clouded.
 - "How is he to-day-cheerful as usual?"
 - "Yes, but he doesn't like to see me at work."
- "I don't think you should write so much, Priscilla. You may do harm...You must excuse my mentioning it, Priscilla. To be sure I have had no experience."

Priscilla started up, her face white, her eyes frightened. "Cardie, don't! It is too cruel! God couldn't have meant that the very means by which my little baby lives should injure her—her whole life!"

- "Dear heart, we don't see what God meant; but the law is there. I know very little about infants, but I know if we sow wheat we shall reap wheat."
- "It is cruel to talk so," said Priscilla passionately. "And isn't that what I have been doing? I have tried to sow a beautiful soul—you say I shall reap 'harm.' Why must I fail?"
- "You have not failed, my dear. That is quite impossible, my dear Priscilla. But you must write less, and—and I should like to suggest that you let your father know."

Miss Cardrew hesitated, a delicate colour in her cheek.

- "I have written; it is no use," said Priscilla.

 "It is so strange; almost the only person I don't love is my own father," she added wistfully.
- "I never understood him, dear. He always terrified me."
- "And me too," said Priscilla thoughtfully
 When she looked up again the light had returned to her face.

THE BIRD IN THE CAGE.

"No, Cardie, my dear; I don't believe in your law of ironies. I have faith in something higher. I believe in love."

"My dear, when you are as old as I am you will find that Love has other names. The name we give him depends on whether he stands on the sunny side of the law of ironies, as you call it, or on the shady side. Yes, I have heard him called Pain, Failure—yes, Death."

Priscilla had a sudden appreciation of the dignity that is independent of externals; but the reflection flitted by. Miss Cardrew's white front trembled over the dead memories her eyes carried, reminding Priscilla of white plumes nodding on a hearse.

A sudden shiver struck through her amusement. She caught the little spinster, shaking her. "You are a bad little thing, talking tombstones. Yes, you are as dismal as—as...Dunstane's cheerfulness." She released the old lady, and paced up and down the room. Presently her face softened, her eyes grew dreamy.

"I don't think I have seen Love on the sunny side yet. I shall scarcely know him when he comes; and Pain, I don't know him either. Will he come leaning on Love? Failure! Ah, yes, I know that one; but I turned my back on him

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- "I must," said Priscilla cheerily; "I must work while I can."
 - "But, my dear, you should think."
- "Don't!" cried Priscilla sharply, putting her hands over her ears. She knew what Miss Cardrew meant, and she could not bear to hear it put into words.
- "Well, I can't stay," said Miss Cardrew. "I am going marketing. Can I get anything for you?"
- "Gertrude is doing my shopping to-day, thank you, Cardie dear. I'm in a bad temper—don't mind me."

The little spinster climbed the steps to her flat.

- "She is looking very ill, dear child; she ought to rest this last month."
- "I will arise and go to her father." The words ran up the steps before her, barking.

Then she understood what she must do. It would need courage. The Rector was a stern, hard man, but Priscilla must not kill herself.

She looked out the trains to Frodsham. She could get down that day, see the Rector, and be back again in the evening.

She put seed and water in the lark's cage; and she was ready for her journey.

Some hours after she was walking up the main street of Frodsham, spying out ancient landmarks. There was the old church, grey where it was not greened by moss and ivy. Round by the south wall was the grave on which the Rector himself laid a wreath every Tuesday. He had loved his wife. "He cannot be so hard," Miss Cardrew thought.

That house with the lace curtains was where the Miss Speaights lived. She had had many cups of tea behind the curtains: they were draped to allow a view of the street from end to end.

There was the grocer's shop-the name of Momerie, Grocer and Tea Dealer, still over the To her town-weary eyes it looked fresh and dainty with its raddled steps and latticed The wreath of onions inside the door swung in the fresh breeze; there was a strong smell of peppermint as she passed. She sniffed approvingly. She always loved them. would not have had to work so hard if she had lived here and kept this nice little shop. looked at it wistfully. "When I have made my fortune I shall come back to Frodsham and take a little shop like this. I should be among friends. That house with the wire blind is

where the auctioneer's widow lives—I can see her head over the blind. Dear me! She still wears a white cap and streamers. They must remind her agreeably of her loss. Poor woman, she had a very sad life with him. I wonder what the goodwill of a business like that could be purchased for? I might go back and purchase an ounce of peppermints. Priscilla was always fond of them. I might ask the question, it could do no harm."

The idea pleased her. She turned back, bought the peppermints, asked the question.

The old man was taciturn. Some businesses was worth more'n others; you might get one cheap and you mightn't. And you might do well wi' groceries and you mightn't. He might be giving up when his lease was out and then again he might not. Maybe next year, maybe not.

The information such as it was excited Miss Cardrew. She put her peppermints into the worked bag she carried. She did not regret her purchase; she had learned something.

This visit to Frodsham prophesied possibilities. She felt ten years younger here than in town; the past led her again by the hand.

She peered about with those keen eyes of hers,

MISS CARDREW RETURNS.

seeing Priscilla everywhere. That was the gate on which the girl used to swing; in that pond she had waded, to the scandal of the village and the shocking of her governess. That was the doctor's gig into which she had climbed, driving away in spite of the suffering coachman. Miss Cardrew was ringing the bell of the Rectory before she realised that she had to face the Rector.

The study was exactly as she remembered it. Entering, the air of the governess perched once more upon her. She felt that it was quarter day, and she had been sent for to receive her salary; nervousness fought with the proper dignity of her position as Priscilla's governess.

The Rector met her as of old, formally, with courtesy. At Priscilla's name he stiffened; but Miss Cardrew was not to be frightened. Neither the Rector nor her "subject"—which was indeed a delicate one—deterred her. She told the whole story without a blush—Dunstane's illness, Priscilla's brave fight, the baby that was coming. She spared neither herself nor her listener. A plucky little soldier she stood undaunted, and fired her shots into the enemy's camp.

When the echoes of the fusillade had died away the Rector drew a note from his purse and laid it on the table.

"Give that to Mrs. Momerie," he said, in a voice that crackled. "Tell her from me that I hope she will not put me to the pain of refusing a second application."

Miss Cardrew slipped the note into her bag with the peppermints.

"I regret to call dear Priscilla's father a beetle," she said to herself, "but he bears a singular resemblance to the Egyptian scarab."

She hurried to the post-office, then to the station, and was in time for the up train.

But she arrived in Regent's Buildings too late.

Everything was quiet as she tolled wearily up the stairs. It was not time for Markham and his set to make night hideous. She was very tired; she would have supper and go to bed. Outside Priscilla's door she stopped. It was impossible, but wasn't that an infant crying?

CHAPTER XI.

DOLORES.

"IT was terrible," Gertrude said, the tears streaming down her face. "All those hours she lay there with a face like death—no cry, no sound. Her eyes seemed to see straight into heaven—smiling, smiling. Mrs. Gibson was certain she would die. I held her hand and wiped her face; it was so little that one could do."

She broke off.

"You ought not to have been there," said Miss Cardrew severely. "I should not have thought of it at my age, and at yours . . ."

The proprieties sat sternly on the white front.

"Oh yes, you would, Miss Cardrew. There was no one else; you would not have left her. Mrs. Gibson was kind, and the doctor; but Priscilla needed me." She wiped her eyes. "All the time I was thinking—

Into the valley of death Rode the six hundred.

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- "Dear heart! dear heart!" The little spinster was crying too.
- "When it was quite over," Gertrude continued, "you should have seen her face! 'Is my little baby all right, Mrs. Gibson?' 'Yes, Mrs. Momerie; I never seed a finer child for eight months—and what lungs!' But it wasn't. The most pitiful mite you ever saw; like a little dead thing."
 - "Where was Mr. Momerie?"
- "At Mr. Malden's. He made Mrs. Gibson wheel him in, and he kept her there talking most wonderfully. She took the child in to show him. 'Oh, baby, baby, you ought not to have come!' he said; and he held the little hand and dropped tears into it." Gertrude stopped to wipe her eyes again. "I wish I wasn't so silly, but it is all so sad; and the little mother lying there, the proudest and happiest woman in all London."
- "I didn't go in," said Miss Cardrew, blowing her nose. "I thought it was advisable not to do so."
 - "I left her sleeping, holding the child."
 - "It's a girl?"
- "Yes; she was always certain it would be. You should have seen her when she named it—Dolores."

DOLORES.

- "Dolores! She meant to call it Beatrice!" cried Miss Cardrew.
- "Yes, but it is so sad altogether." Gertrude began to cry again.
- "It has been too much for you, my dear," said the little spinster.
- "It is not that, Miss Cardrew, but, sitting there, everything appeared different. Life and death were so near. I seemed to touch eternity. And I felt so small. What did it matter whether I ever became a great singer or not? Nothing mattered—nothing but death. Supposing Priscilla had died then."
- "The little coachman would have found another team," said Miss Cardrew tremulously.

* * * * * *

One Sunday afternoon Priscilla held a reception. It had been difficult to persuade her to rest. There was so much depending on her. She must begin her work for the sake of the child. She understood now what made it possible for women like Mrs. Markham to go back to the factory so soon. With those tiny hands pushing her on, it is quite certain that Priscilla would have defied everybody and begun her work, had it not been for that envelope bearing the Frodsham

postmark that she had received. It had contained a ten-pound note and a scrap of writing, "For Mrs. Momerie's baby."

Miss Cardrew was greatly excited when she heard about it. She insisted on seeing the note and the paper. But she did not recognise the Rector's writing, though it could have come from no one else, she maintained. This opportune note gave Priscilla a longer rest; and as soon as it was possible she called her friends and neighbours together to rejoice with her. They had made the sitting-room into a bedroom for Dunstane, so she held her reception in the kitchen. She scarcely recognised the place when she came Malden had stripped his studio of curtains and rugs to make it cosy; his most comfortable chair held out its arms to her. Gertrude had provided flowers; Miss Cardrew had hung the lark in the window. The kindness and love of it all made Priscilla very happy. She wore Mrs. Markham's white shawl-lent for the occasion; Gertrude's present, a wrap of snowy elegance, would keep for another day.

She sat paler than usual; the old gaiety on her face transfigured into happiness. The baby slept in her arms. The little spinster and Gertrude were on their knees before the two, wondering,

DOLORES.

pitying, adoring. Malden was also a worshipper, but in the outer court.

The only permanent religion, he was thinking, is that which has for its central figures a mother and child—and Botticelli himself never imagined a more perfect Madonna.

The big man looked shy, and somewhat out of place in that cluster of emotional women. He had a kitten in each pocket of his coat, and the two fluffy heads against the rough coat made a fascinating picture.

But Priscilla did not care a straw for the kittens. He stole away and left them in the studio. But he came back again and hung about aimlessly, listening to the women purring and cooing over the baby. If Dunstane had been there it would have saved the situation, but Dunstane preferred to remain in the sitting-room. He could not bear the excitement, but his thoughts would be with Priscilla.

Malden forgave the women's raptures. Babies were not much in his line, but he would have welcomed anything that brought the happiness to Priscilla's face. By-and-by, in came Mrs. Markham and the Markham children, and Jimmy Gibson, all in their Sunday clothes, with clean faces, herding together. The sight of Mrs.

Momerie reassured them, and they went forward and stood gazing at the morsel of humanity on her lap.

Priscilla acted showman, proudly showing the eyelashes, the dear little hands, the tiny feet.

Mrs. Markham dropped into the background, put her apron over her face, and behind it whispered sobbing to Mrs. Gibson:—

"It's as like the one I lost, it might ha' been the same. It's give me quite a turn to see it; that was the way mine looked when it was laid out."

Suddenly the eldest girl spoke up shrilly—

- "It's not much of a byby to look at. Not like our Sallie—'er was a wopper, 'er was."
- "It's like our last byby wot died," piped another small voice.

Malden saw the scared look in Priscilla's eyes. She turned them on the baby and then on the children, tracing pitiful dissimilarities.

- "We put our byby in a box and deaded it," said Susie, smiling into Priscilla's face.
 - "Oh, hush, my dear!" said Miss Cardrew.
- "Little gels should be seen and not 'eard," said Mrs. Gibson. "Run away to your play now."

"We never pl'ys 'cept when Mrs. Momerie pl'ys with us."

Malden stepped forward.

"Will you trust the youngster to me a minute, Mrs. Momerie? I should like to hold her. What a fragile little flower it is! I like them small and young, and helpless like this," he went on. "Those robust young rascals, all legs and arms, don't reach one's heart so soon as these wee white dollies."

Priscilla's eyes were on them with a look he could not meet.

A flicker passed over the baby's face.

- "Do you see? She is smiling in her sleep," he said.
- "The angels are whispering to her," murmured Miss Cardrew.
- "Lor, ma'am! it's only the wind. Wherever did I put that dill water now?" said Mrs. Gibson, bustling.

Malden's shoulders were shaking. He crossed the room and gave the baby to Gertrude Tennant.

CHAPTER XII.

TOBIAS AND THE ANGELS.

It was a grey day. The rain made bars shutting Dunstane in from the outside world. The steps on the passages were muffled and heavy with damp. The rain dulled the roar of the traffic too, the voice of that human sea that moaned around, never resting; tossing and surging along the streets of the city casting up mire and dirt. It hid the skies, drawing its curtains across the window-panes.

Dunstane's sofa was strewn with papers as usual, but he was not writing. His eyes roved about the fire in the grate, the pictures over the mantelpiece; the Madonna, Tobias and the angels.

He was getting used to them now. The beauty of the Madonna face was slowly making its way to his heart. He liked the other picture, too. It was pleasant to look at Tobias being led forth

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TOBIAS AND THE ANGELS.

by the angels. His fancy read meanings into the picture.

Tobias was the New Religion; the angels beside him were Faith and Hope. Whence were they leading him? Tobias was the Great Work itself, and Success led it by the hand... He himself was Tobias, and the Angel that led him was—Priscilla?

No, certainly not Priscilla!

It was strange that no one saw any difference in Priscilla's conduct since the birth of the child. The change was more than evident to him . . . she no longer cared to listen to his ideals and aspirations; talk of his book openly bored her. . . . She cared for nothing but the child . . . yes, and her writing . . . When she was not nursing the baby she was at her endless manuscripts. She had no time for him . . . But he could not complain of her neglect . . . he had everything that she could give, and she studied his comfort. Every day she planned some change to break the monotony of his life: a new book, clean curtains, an alteration in the furniture, the meals. ingenuity was endless. She managed the house admirably, triumphant over London grime. Everything about them was dainty and clean. If he had not had the tramp of heavy boots on

the steps and the coarseness of the voices to remind him that he lived in Regent's Buildings, it would have been easy to imagine himself in an elegant flat in Kensington.

He did not miss cultured society either. Miss Cardrew, who appreciated genius, could always spare an hour to read or talk to him: she liked nothing better than to discuss his book with him. She was a woman of taste. He liked to see her eyes light up at his eloquence: she gave him tribute of tears. And she took a great interest in the book;—she was not like Priscilla, who had ceased to believe in it.

He was still preparing to begin the New Religion; every day he was busy with the notes he had made at the British Museum, sorting, indexing, arranging... and Miss Cardrew had a capital memory... Every day Malden brought him the paper and gave up half-an-hour to its discussion. The superiority of the Conservative lent weight to Momerie's arguments; but he had not converted Malden from his Radicalism. He and Priscilla were hopeless red rags... Gertrude Tennant had more sense, though she had lately lowered her *Standard* to the *Chronicle*. She was otherwise a fine girl. She supplied him with flowers and never thought it a trouble to sing to

TOBIAS AND THE ANGELS.

him... The other women were good decent souls after their lights. They pitied and made much of him, and could admire his energy in working while so helpless... If Priscilla and the baby had not been jarring notes he might have found life harmonious enough.

His wife was the only person in the Buildings who was not impressed by his qualities... He felt that she would have cared more for him if he had been making five hundred a year... Strange that so young a woman should have so mercenary a spirit. No one seeing her gentle ways would have suspected her of sordidness... But it was true; she cared for nothing but money, ambition, and the child.

If the baby had been healthy it would have made a difference; but a sickly child could be nothing but a drag upon them. He suspected that Priscilla had already begun to feel it. She had lost her gaiety and spirit. Sometimes her face was even haggard. She only looked happy when the child was in her arms. It was absurd that she could not bear it out of her sight... To-day now, was it a fit day to take a delicate child out? Yet she would not be persuaded... obstinate girl...

He looked up again at the picture . . . He

might be Tobias, but Priscilla was not the Angel . . . that was certain.

He heard her stamping on the landing to shake the rain from her cloak; then she went into the kitchen to remove her wet things. She had worn a sailor hat black and shiny and waterproof, and a caped ulster. She could not spare an arm for an umbrella, and the cape protected Dollie. watched her as she entered the sitting-room. The colour that the wind had splashed on her face, the child she carried, her alert air, suggested a picture of Life pausing on the threshold.

- "I am afraid you have thought me long, Dunstane, but it rained so it was not easy to get on."
 - "The child must be wet through."

She looked down at her bundle, smiling.

- "No indeed! I took care of that."
- "I wanted you to find a paper for me . . . I don't know where it is . . . probably in one of the drawers in the bedroom."
- "I will look for it as soon as I have given Dollie her lunch and put her to sleep."

Dunstane closed his eyes and turned his face to the wall. That was always the way; -Dollie first . . . He and his work were of no consequence whatever. He did well to be angry.

He missed the picture that Priscilla made sit-

TOBIAS AND THE ANGELS.

ting on the low chair before the fire;—the little white face pressed against her white bosom, the love in the head bending, the firelight making the raindrops in her hair a glittering crown.

Presently she rose and began to walk about.

"I am so sorry, dear. This little naughty thing will not go to sleep."

She smiled tenderly as she said it.

- "I am at a standstill for the want of that paper," he said sulkily.
- "Yes, dear, I know . . . but in a few minutes . . ."
- "Give the child to me . . . I will hold her while you get it . . ."

Priscilla stared at him, not believing her ears. It was six months since Dollie had come, and he had never wanted to touch her. He discoursed on the beauty and mystery of motherhood and the dignity of fatherhood, was eloquent on the loveliness of infancy; but he had never looked at the child since the first day . . . Her arms tightened about the baby . . . a sudden jealousy was in her heart . . . Then she went over and gave Dollie to him without a word. The little face puckered up as he took her. He shook his finger at her—Dollie stretched out her hand and caught the finger and put it in her mouth.

"You little thing!" said Dunstane, pleased.

Priscilla had to look a long time before she found the paper he wanted;—but he was not impatient. The tiny grasp held him captive, sending the blood through his veins... If it had not been for the colourlessness of her face, Dollie would have been pretty... but she was a nice little thing. She seemed to like staring at him with her big eyes. And now they were closing.

Still sucking his finger, Dollie fell asleep.

When Priscilla came back after a weary hunt, Dunstane did not want the paper. And he would not have the child disturbed. He could hold her quite well... She was a nice little thing.

Priscilla said nothing, but her eyes brightened and clung to the baby. She stooped and kissed her. Then, a second thought, she kissed Dunstane.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW RELIGION.

MALDEN was having one of his "At Homes." The curtains were drawn, the lamps lighted. The red shades gave warmth and colour to the blank corners

Some praying-rugs were on the floor and on the divan; their tones were repeated in cushion and curtain. His easel stood apart:—the canvases on the wall were like irregular features on a white face. Swords, a skull, and other stockin-trade were disposed for ornamentation. A screen stood on one side, brown paper only, but the medallions and miniatures that hung upon it gave it artistic value. At the end of the room was the picture he had painted on the wall for Jimmy Gibson, the procession of angels carrying lilies. And the flame of the wood-fire reddened the white of robe and flower.

Near the divan the people were grouped;—

half a dozen men, artists, students, journalists; Miss Cardrew, Gertrude, Priscilla, and Dollie.

Malden had wheeled Dunstane in. He was propped up on the divan and they were listening to him. He talked on. The men forgot their cigars and leaned forward, their eyes bright. His philosophy of life was new and strange and wonderful. This religion of his opened green paths to their feet... it lured them upward... showed them glittering spaces. Earth dropped in the lower night... They were among the stars.

Miss Cardrew listened weeping, but softly, lest the fall of a tear should stun that delicate eloquence. Gertrude heard him, her hands knitted, her bosom heaving. He gave her wings . . . she soared. Everything was possible, nothing impossible—Success? Fame? . . . They were hers . . . Faith and Hope gave royally . . .

Dunstane stopped, and the earth was about them again. Ashamed of their emotion the men fell apart. When the circle re-formed, Priscilla, holding the little pale baby, was the central figure.

"When I write a book," she said dreamily, "I shall call it The Book of the Great City. The pages will be white with the faces of children . . ."

THE NEW RELIGION.

"Tell us about your book," said Malden huskily.

So Priscilla told them.

They came closer to hear her; and she told them how, as she went about the streets, she heard always the sob of pity and of death. In the faces passing her she saw hungry souls that cried with a great cry... and no man cared for their souls...

She made them hear the moaning of the great human sea;—she made them look at the white faces of men and women and children drifting past; she made them hear the cry of the drowning and the laugh of those that passed them, pitiless... She made them see the agony of those who heard and would have helped, but were powerless...

She showed them success and failure . . . the price that men paid for their souls . . . the thirty pieces of silver for which they betrayed the God in them . . . Some of them returned and cast the money at the feet of the priests . . . They built churches . . . and then went out and hanged themselves . . .

She lifted the lid from the coffin of a dead woman, and made them look... The man that had laid her there passed the parish hearse on his

way to church. He had a white flower in his button-hole; there were white favors on the horses. It was his wedding-day . . .

She led them from city to suburb; from the crowded living people shuffling each other into the earth that they might have space for breath, to the crowded dead people shuffling each other out of the earth that they might have room for death . . .

They followed her West and East, through the sun and the rain, among the faces that misery whitened, among the faces that misery painted . . . It was the same flesh, but the misery that was not painted was less miserable . . .

The tears were scorched on Miss Cardrew's cheeks; the eyes of the men were dull, their hearts burning. Gertrude's eyes glittered... there was something brighter than the stars;—it lay in the mud at her feet.

The talk became general... across those dark clouds wit played like summer lightning; meteor stories trailed... Pathos that cackled with laughter, humour whose eyes held tears, took their place in the group. The men talked as they talked at their clubs. Miss Cardrew's sentiment was like a sprig of thyme in the buttonhole of a frock-coat.

THE NEW RELIGION.

After a while Gertrude sang. When she had finished they clamoured . . . She sang on and on.

Priscilla slipped away with Dollie and did not return. The room was suddenly chill. Malden stirred the wood. The divan was in shadow, but the flame flickered on the procession of angels carrying lilies.

- "The man is a genius," said Gertrude.
- "He is more than that," Miss Cardrew an swered; "he is a prophet, a priest, a king . . ."
- "I shouldn't go so far," said Gertrude dispassionately. "Though the poet may be all the three... and he is a poet."
 - "He is a humbug!" said Malden.

They did not notice him.

- "He surpassed himself last night; I could not sleep until morning," said Miss Cardrew.
- "Nor I... Priscilla stirred me more, but her husband has a strange power."
- "He is the biggest humbug I know..." Malden repeated in a louder key. "He talks all day of sacrifice...then he offers up his wife."
- "You are quite wrong!" said Gertrude hotly. "He is devoted to her."

- "He devotes her to himself," Malden sneered.
- "I don't like to hear you speak like that, Mr. Malden," said Miss Cardrew. "The patience and cheerfulness with which Mr. Momerie has borne his terrible affliction are a lesson to us all."
- "Do you think he feels it?" Malden asked cynically.

The two women turned upon him.

- "Feels it? . . . Inhuman!" cried the spinster.
- "How would you like to lie there all day?—a strong man . . ." Gertrude choked. She looked reproachfully at him.
- "If he were a strong man," said Malden . . . "But he is not; he is a weak fool . . ."
- "You forget that he is our dear Priscilla's husband," said Miss Cardrew with dignity.
- "It is the only thing I remember about him."
- "I never heard you unkind before," said Gertrude. "I think it is terrible to see him lying there working at his book; eager, hopeful... never tired, never impatient ..."
- "If he were a man he would work at something else," said Malden.
- "How can he? What is there for a helpless paralytic to do?"

Miss Cardrew's white front bobbed about, showing her indignation.

- "He could undertake tuition by correspondence . . . he could get reviewing to do . . . write literary articles . . . He could learn to make baskets like the blind old fellow downstairs . . . he could sit on the pavement with a tin can on his chest and a placard inviting charity. It would be more dignified than his present position . . ." Malden got up and paced about angrily.
- "Mr. Malden, you shock me . . . indeed you do! You forget that Mr. Momerie is giving to the world a New Religion."
- "And what good will his new religion do the world when he has given it? . . . What is his new religion but the old religion, minus love? . . . It is like the man to have left out the greatest thing of all . . . He builds his arch without a keystone. He sends his balloon among the stars. There is no god in the car . . . nothing but gas."
- "If he were a humbug, don't you think a woman like Priscilla would have found it out long ago?" said Gertrude hesitatingly. "Look how devoted to him she is . . . I wanted her to come to tea to-day, but just because he said he would miss her she wouldn't come."
 - "She goes nowhere," said Miss Cardrew:-L

- "her devotion and self-sacrifice are beautiful . . . But she has her reward in being privileged to serve such a man."
 - "A privilege indeed!" Malden echoed.
- "Ah, yes, indeed it is so . . . If he had not our dear Priscilla there is nothing I should esteem more highly than to be permitted to take him to some sheltered spot and watch over him while he finished his great work . . ."
- "Finished, Miss Cardrew! He has not even begun it yet, confound him!"
- "Oh, I assure you, Mr. Malden, I saw the first page myself... It was beautifully written, 'The New Religion, by Dunstane Momerie,' in Old English characters. 'Begun November 3d, 1891'... that was the date of his marriage... he has such pretty ideas..."
 - "And what else?" asked Malden.
- "There was nothing else. The page was blank. But knowing the man, we know what will follow . . ."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE STUDIO.

MALDEN uncovered his picture and stood before it with critical eyes. Yes, it was good; he was not deceiving himself... Pity it was too late for this year's Academy... He had never done work as true... The technical part—well, of course that might be better; but the whole thing, the expression, the pathos—how had he caught it?

There was a lump in his throat as he gazed. It was not the Madonna he had imagined. There was no girlish beauty in this face... it was not the Priscilla that had come to Regent's Buildings a year and a half ago. Where had he caught that wonderful look?

Dollie was in her arms; but the expression on her face was not the young-mother love he had intended to paint... Mary's eyes, when she stood on Calvary, must have looked like the eyes on his canvas. Neither happiness nor youth was

there. Life was drowning in the depths of their pain. Despair shrieked from their silence.

"A Nineteenth-Century Madonna" he had called it. It was a fitting name for a haggard Civilization holding the babe Want.

His heart was stirred as he gazed.

He had loved her so long-from the moment he had first seen her. He would have laid down his life for her . . . but he must stand outside and see her suffer . . . Society forbade him to pass the barrier that divided her from his help. Here was a woman drowning, going down in the black waters of despair, and because he was a man he must not spring to save her. he loved her to a thousand deaths, he must not put out his hand to rescue her . . . "If the man was murdering her in the fashion in which husbands usually murder their wives I would be pardoned if I stopped him . . . But because he is doing it delicately, without poker or knife, I must not interfere. He is killing her by inches ... and those women stand by applauding ..."

She was so young to be sacrificed . . . If he might give her even so little as his sympathy, surely it would bring the light back to her eyes, the colour to her lips . . . Everything was going —her beauty, her youth, even her child.

IN THE STUDIO.

He gulped down his trouble.

How those women could look at Dollie and not break their hearts! . . . Her heart was breaking, but she hid it from them all . . . It was his love that had peered behind the mask . . . And while Dollie died she had to strive and strain and slave that her husband might enjoy his idleness—his New Religion.

He laughed bitterly. If he had not begged the favour of that hour a day, when she sat to him with Dollie in her arms, she would scarcely have known what it was to brood over the little face.

It was almost time for her to come in now . . . He smoothed out the lines of trouble from his forehead; whistled softly that he might appear gay . . . drew a chair forward and shook up its cushions . . . put the bowl of violets where she would smell them. When Priscilla came in she found a tall man in a shabby coat who had kind eyes, and a manner casual almost to discourtesy.

But he had noticed her tired droop.

She stood beside him looking at the canvas.

"It is beautiful...the very image of the little maid...Dollie herself...my white

flower...But—but—do I look like that?—so hungry and wan and ill?"

- "It is like no one else, Mrs. Momerie."
- "I must be growing very old."
- "It is not that you look old . . . it is the sadness . . . Last year you were so bright . . ."
- "I think I had a merry heart then . . . But now it is hard to be glad . . . I have never seen my little baby smile . . . Think of it, Mr. Malden . . . Dollie is seven months old and she hasn't learned to smile yet . . . But I think she is growing . . . don't you?"
- "Bravely," he lied heroically. "She only wants the sun to bring the colour to those pale cheeks."
- "Yes, I know," said Priscilla eagerly. "The spring is very trying in these Buildings... I feel it myself. She should be out all day, only there is so much to do. I have been wondering if I might trust Jimmy Gibson. He might sit at the door holding her, I think. The other babies are pale... but not like my Dollie... On the steps she would get the sun and air."
- "A capital plan . . . Jimmy is to be trusted with anything of yours, Mrs. Momerie—even Dollie."
 - " I think he is."

IN THE STUDIO.

The eagerness passed from her face. She sank down in her chair. She was always tired now.

Malden took up palette and brush and painted in silence.

- "All that Dollie wants is colour," said Priscilla wistfully, as if thinking aloud. "She has never been ill and she seldom cries. She is so good, lying looking at me with her solemn big eyes... I think I love her more than if she had had a merry heart... So fragile she is... I am glad you have painted her... It will be nice to think of it when she is a great, rosy, romping girl... But I shall be sorry when you have finished... The time I sit here with Dollie is the best hour of the day."
- "I want to paint a companion to this," said Malden eagerly. "I was going to ask you to sit again . . . I want another study of Dollie."
 - "I think you love my little baby."
- "No one but you loves her more than I do, Mrs. Momerie, no one . . ."

Malden had squeezed the whole of a tube of rose madder on to his palette before he discovered what he was doing.

"Do you know," said Priscilla softly, "Dunstane is getting quite fond of her. In fact he

has her now all the time I am writing; and even when I am ready to take her he doesn't want to give her up."

- "So you don't have her at all?" He laughed harshly.
- "I have her at nights . . . I lie awake all night that I may feel I have her."

He had no answer to make, and Priscilla did not speak for a time.

She wondered if that was herself he was painting—herself as she was, the woman who had tasted failure, disappointment, disillusion, the bitterness of a loveless life. She who loved everybody had not been able to love her husband. neither to keep his love. He had passed the days of passion . . . there was nothing left of the feeling he had had for her. He still needed her, but it was only his helplessness that made her necessary to him, and it was only his helplessness that made her give him the attention she had once given heartily and loyally.

"Do you remember the chalk study that you made of me when I was first married?" she asked.

Yes, he remembered it; he had it still.

"I wonder if you would let me look at it; I should like to compare them—this picture with that."

He brought it from the oak chest and put it on the easel beside the Madonna. Then he stepped backward and stood behind Priscilla's chair and they compared the two;—the happiness of the girl, the anguish of the woman.

- "Was I ever like that?" she asked wonderingly. "Was I ever so happy?"
- "I like the last better," he said hoarsely, turning his eyes away from the pitiful contrast. "I would not change the Madonna for the Maiden... That girl did not know what love was."
- "And yet I was happy! But that can't be the reason . . . no, it can't! else this last picture would be young and smiling too . . . for still I don't know what love is . . . I only know the ache and hunger and anguish of wanting it . . ." She drew the child closer . . . "But I have my little baby Thank God! I have my little baby" she said passionately.

Malden stood behind her chair, keeping from her his white face, his strangling breath... He knew her secret now—the secret that he had guessed months ago... She was hungry for love—and he had so much to give her...

He turned his head away. His eyes were upon the procession of angels carrying lilies.

- "Do you know," he said gravely, "I am sure it is not that which makes the difference between the two pictures. It—is something deeper than happiness or—or the want of love."
- "I don't know what it can be," she said wearily.
 - "It is love itself."

CHAPTER XV.

A NEW SONG.

AND so the tragedy acted itself out;—the sordid little tragedy that is enacted every moment of the year on the London boards. The tragedy of life and of death. It was Priscilla who took the leading part in the grim play at No. 30 Regent's Buildings, who saw most clearly the meaning of the tragedy. She had awakened after the first Now scene by scene she watched the developments clustering round the principal characters -the strong woman bound for life to a weakling, The pathos and pity of a faint outline of man. it were not lessened for her because she knew that the same tragedy was being played out in the lives round her on many a household hearth. Her sad eyes read failure on every page of her life.

She was writing now for any market. She brought forth stories that were agony and humiliation to her; poor, pitiful romances that had not a drop of red blood in their rickety bodies;

anæmic little creatures that were not stillborn only because they had learned to adapt themselves to their life conditions. She brought forth these children of her pen in shame; they were illegitimate offspring fathered by want. She had laid down the pride of life—youth and health, joy and hope had already gone—that the child she loved might live. It was for Dollie that she was working. She had blinded her eyes and told herself that the child throve; but her heart wore no bandages; and as the summer came on, making the white cheeks more waxen and transparent, all her cry was to take the child away out of the heat into the country.

She told Dunstane of the necessity. He met her more than half-way and talked royally of the holiday they would have when his book came out.

She turned from him in bitterness... How many times might Dollie die before that immortal myth came to their help!

And still she was growing more tolerant of Dunstane. The baby gave her a new view of him, showing kind traits in his disposition. He was tender, gentle as a woman, with more than a woman's patience. His love for Dollie appealed to her. He was never tired of having the child

A NEW SONG.

He said it was better for her to lie beside him. sucking his finger than to sprawl neglected on the mat. Priscilla quieted her jealousy. her task easier to know that Dollie was being looked after while she scrubbed and cleaned and cooked and wrote. She had less of Dollie, but Dunstane no longer hurt her by his neglect of the child, and she drew nearer to him. She might yet love her child's father, she thought wistfully. She could not take the baby's fingers in hers without touching his hand. In the rare moments of idleness, when Dunstane would not give up Dollie, she brought her hassock close to the sofa and leaned her head beside Dollie's-Dunstane's head was on the same pillow. And they had a subject in common now. Dunstane began to talk less of his great work and more about Dollie. Priscilla listened happily to the dreams he wove around the child. She could have gazed for hours on the rosy future he painted. There was nothing unreal or fanciful in these visions . . . Who should inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, if not her baby? . . . Of such was the Kingdom . . .

Dunstane was really wonderfully patient and cheerful. The only change in his life was an occasional visit to Malden's studio. He never went out of the Buildings. The long flights of stairs

would have made it a heavy task to have carried him down, and there was no lift. Malden had offered to rig up a pulley and lower him over the balustrades in his chair, but Dunstane had not accepted the offer. He was quite happy in his "Priscilla's lark" the little spinster called him. The only time he grumbled was when Priscilla carried Dollie downstairs and with many tremors laid her on Jimmy Gibson's knee where he sat sunning himself on the doorstep. But Priscilla let him grumble. She yielded to his slightest whim where she was concerned, but she would not sacrifice her baby . . . She, at least, should not be a victim.

After the first day she was not afraid of trusting Jimmy with the baby. He took literally her caution that he was not to stir, and sat cramped and stiff sooner than risk a movement that might hurt Mrs. Momerie's baby. To Jimmy Mrs. Momerie was a vision of angels. It was her coming to the Buildings that had brought the sun into his life. Till she set the fashion, no one had ever thought it worth while to notice him during his mother's absence, though they had been kind to him while he was ill. Now he was invited to sit in Mr. Malden's studio and talk of Mrs. Momerie while the artist worked. Miss

A NEW SONG.

Tennant's flat, too, that paradise of art screens and down cushions, was a blissful reality to him now. Gertrude liked the flattery of his rapt face while she sang; and she had found out that he had a pretty voice of his own.

Miss Cardrew had always had a kind word for him, but it was only since Mrs. Momerie had come to the Buildings that she had catered for his little stomach. He liked the mild stories she told him, but he liked more the gingerbread and peppermints that now sometimes came his way. He would have suffered much more for Mrs. Momerie than that half-hour's cramp while he nursed Dollie, sitting on the step in the sun. Besides, at the end of his penance, Mrs. Momerie always gave him a kiss—which he wiped off—and said, "Thank you, Jimmy. What a dear, useful little chap you are!"

Every day Dunstane grumbled about the arrangement. He was nervous about the child, he said. Priscilla told him he was growing fussy—but she loved him for it.

Her spirits were coming back. Though she did not acknowledge it, it made her work lighter to give up the child to Dunstane; and the half-hours on the doorstep brought a faint rose to Dollie's cheek and a glow of hope to the mother's

heart. The new interest between Dunstane and herself was a promise of still better things. She could face the future without fear.

One thing lay heavy on Priscilla's heart. stane would not allow her to take Dollie to St. Pancras to be baptised. The rector had visited But when Dunstane spoke of his New Religion Mr. Groves had listened disapprovingly. Finally he had rebuked the man's iconoclasm. Dunstane might call the ancient faith an image and destroy it. But the old truths were of gold, and the image was made in the likeness of God. This new religion of his was no religion at all, but a vague and formless philosophy. And it would be better for Dunstane that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and he should be cast into the depths of the sea, than be allowed to give to the world a hollow mockery of truth.

Dunstane was mortally offended, and Mr. Groves came no more to No. 30 Regent's Buildings. But when Priscilla spoke of her wish that Dollie should be baptised, he reminded her that she had been content with his decision as to their marriage at the registrar's. That silenced her; but she resolved that Dollie should have her name given to her in church when they went to the country. That trip to the country was coming

within measuring distance. She had had unexpected good fortune in being asked to write a serial for High Life.

It would be hurried work; the manuscript must be in the publisher's hands by the end of July, but it would be paid for on delivery. The price was £20. It was wealth to Priscilla. Working early and late, for months she had not earned more than thirty shillings a week. This would more than pay for Dollie's trip to the sun. would remove to some village near and spend a month out-of-doors. She could go on with her Dunstane and Dollie would lie under writing. the trees while she worked.

Hope came back to Priscilla's heart and life to her face. She was a different person from the weary woman who had sat in Malden's studio. Since Dollie had been born she had never been so happy.

Her pen flew over the paper. She had no time to give to her friends; but they saw her bright face and the light came to more than one heart in Regent's Buildings.

Dunstane was as excited as she over the serial. It held a whole universe of possibilities in it... Twenty pounds! But it took more time than Priscilla had expected. Sixty thousand words, 161

and she had only fifteen days longer! But she rode her hack recklessly. Dollie's hands held the whip.

It was Dunstane who told her he thought the little thing could not be well. She was always quiet and pale, but he thought her face had a grey shadow on it to-day.

Priscilla snatched up the child, devouring it with her eyes... She saw nothing wrong and gave her back to Dunstane; but her work came to a standstill. She could not write... Dollie's white face was on every page...

At last she could bear it no longer; every moment was of value. To-morrow the story must be in the hands of the editor... She must save time by giving up an hour to her fears...

In an hour she had returned from Dr. Barker's, joyful in her great relief. She took off the shawl in which she had wrapped Dollie and laid her again on the sofa.

"Nothing wrong at all! Teething!" she cried rapturously. "My little Dollie is going to have some little white teeth. She is beginning to be a great girl... She will have to try and grow fat and rosy..."

A NEW SONG.

She sat down to her manuscript, working the better for the break... "One more day, and my Dollie will go to the sun," she sang.

She was writing all that night, but could not overtake the end of the story, and the next morning Dollie was fretful. Her wail went to Priscilla's heart... She took her on her knee, nursing her as she wrote. "My Dollie will soon be better... she is going to the sun," she whispered happily.

In a fever of excitement she began the last chapter. She could not stop to eat.

Miss Cardrew came in and gave Dunstane his lunch, stepping gingerly on tiptoe so as not to disturb Priscilla. She was going out of town for the afternoon; the heat tried her. At two o'clock Priscilla threw down her pen, lifted the child and sang her new song joyfully.

"My Dollie is going to the sun!"

She would not stay for food though Miss Cardrew had left a tray ready for her before she went away. She would go to the office, receive her cheque, cash it before the bank closed at four, come home, pack up... and "To-morrow, to-morrow my Dollie shall go to the sun."

She laid her down beside Dunstane, kissed the little white face, the waxen hands.

Then she hurried away. Her errand would not take her long... Her feet sped, her face smiled... She would have liked to shout her happy secret. The moan of the great sea was silenced by that chime of bells "My Dollie is going to the sun."

Dunstane lay on the sofa where she had left him; his writing materials on one side, Dollie on the other, sleeping quietly. In an hour she would be awake, Priscilla had said, but she herself would be back by that time.

"An hour for my work," Dunstane had remarked as she left him. He turned from his child to his notes, and fingered them discontentedly. They were not what he wanted; and how could he get others, unable as he was to go to the British Museum Library, or to buy books? He looked them over lazily, and the impotence of inaction settled down upon him. It was growing pleasant to him, however, this fruitless dallying with the writing that excused his idleness. He liked it better than the thought of coaching pupils.

He turned over his memoranda for the tenth chapter: "The Position of Women among the Jews."

"At any rate I can do that," he muttered.

A NEW SONG.

"It's only to draw on my memory of Old Testament history—a mere grind. How insufferable the whole question has become! I cannot imagine that I ever took any interest in social topics. If I have an audience they are well enough, but in themselves..."

He lost himself in complacent recollections of that last evening at Malden's. Then he pulled himself together, and began speaking his thoughts aloud.

"Take a few of the types among women of the Old Testament. There was Sara, merely Sons were the great need of the childbearer. those times; sons to fight, to protect the cattle, to feed them; sons to increase and multiply that the heathen might be overpowered. The social problem of that time was the struggle between the Jews and their heathen neighbours; and hence the importance of women. Then how it developed! Miriam, the prophetess, the singer who inspired the army; Deborah, a singer too, and a judge, yet also a mother in Israel; and Jael, who bought forty years of peace with one stroke of a hammer. Then, in the prosperous years, her place is changed and we have her in domestic love, as in the case of Michal for David. Her position sinks lower in his passion for Bath-

sheba; and lower again in the harems of Solomon.

"That was largely the position of women at the beginning of this century, and, with all their efforts, they have scarcely bettered it. What, indeed, is their place in the social questions of to-day? If they are not wives, they are nothing. Look at Priscilla, for instance; an abnormal creature except in her domestic relations..."

Dollie stirred uneasily and choked a little, but he did not hear.

"And yet," he went on, "she has no destiny apart from her life with me. Dollie should take a higher place than that in history. I must train her into being the typical woman of the day."

Dollie choked again, turned, stretched a rigid little arm towards Dunstane, but he was too absorbed in his subject to notice her.

"What does the age want? A son-bearer? Yes, we must have sons; yes, and a prophetess who shall have the vision of truth upon her eyeballs, and shall proclaim it to the ignorant struggling people. We must have a Deborah who shall lead them to their just inheritance, a Jael who shall strike . . . "

A loud wail, a sob of agony broke upon Dunstane's words. He turned quickly and saw a

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grey cloud upon Dollie's face; he saw her limbs twitch and writhe strangely.

He put his hand on her head, patting her softly, but he could not quiet her.

"I am afraid she is ill," he said anxiously. "And I am helpless. If I could call Malden now or Mrs. Gibson . . ."

He rapped on the wall. There was no answer. The child grew worse.

"It looks like convulsions," he said, getting pale; "if she should die . . . I must call some one . . . Mrs. Markham! . . . Malden! . . . Miss Cardrew! . . ." he shouted.

He waited. The shadow on Dollie's face had passed from grey to black. He sprang up from his sofa and rushed to the door. Then suddenly he remembered that he had not walked for months. With the memory his helplessness returned, and he fell to the floor.

He was almost relieved to find himself lying on the matting: it proved that he was still paralysed. He was not anxious to end his life of inaction. He had grown accustomed to its monotony; and as an invalid author he filled a more important place in his world than would be given to an unsuccessful tutor.

After all it was a good thing no one had seen

him walk. He must get back to the couch and see what could be done for the child. He dragged himself to the sofa, and bent towards the baby. She was quiet now; her colour was more natural.

Pshaw! What a fool he had been, frightened at nothing! She would be all right till her mother returned.

He lay down again beside her, and became absorbed in himself and in the thought of what his recovery would mean.

After a time he glanced at the child. How still she lay, and how pale her face had grown! He put out his hand and touched her softly. Dollie was dead.

There was only an empty horror in his mind as he lay there with the silent little figure beside him: he must bear its dumb reproach. The last hour had been charged with a rush of sensations, with fear and dread, love for his child, and with his own strong love for himself. And sweeping down upon that love came a fierce shaft of light striking him to the very earth.

Beside him was Death, cold and still and terrible; within was Light, strong, compelling. He saw himself, the coward, the hypocrite, the abject slave of vanity, idleness, deceit.

A NEW SONG.

His soul lay bare in the white clearness of that flash, and he loathed the ugly sight. He might have saved the child.

As the light forked and died, the words filled his ears with deafening thunder. He might have saved the child. He shrank down, covering his ears and face.

Priscilla took a hansom from the bank, laughing gaily at the luxury she had purchased. It was not for herself that she was extravagant; though now that her work was done she remembered the sleepless night, the long fast . . .

Regent's Buildings looked deadly seen from the hansom. The place was always dull in the afternoon, when the children were at school the elders at their school too. Coming in from the glare and heat outside, the silence struck Priscilla with a chill.

She ran up the steps... What a long, long time it was since she had run up... certainly not since Dollie was born.

In the hall she threw off her hat and pressed into the room singing gaily... "My Dollie is going to the sun! My Dollie is going to the sun..."

Dunstane was lying curled up, his face to the

wall. He reminded her of a leaf shrivelled by storm. He did not look round as usual to tell her Dollie was asleep, and she must not take her ... The child would not disturb his work ... she was a nice little thing ...

She stooped and lifted her baby, wondering at the strange heaviness in the little body... She stumbled to a chair and sat down, pressing her face against the baby's face... The cold set her shivering... laid ice upon her heart... She gazed at the child with eyes of terror. Her lips moved, but no sound came... Her teeth chattered... she laughed shrilly... "My Dollie is going to the sun."

CHAPTER XVI.

DOLLIE GOES TO THE SUN.

"FOR God's sake hush, Priscilla! Don't you see the child is dead?"

She stopped her awful mirth, and raised her head: "Did you kill my little baby, Dunstane?"

The words fell involuntarily from her lips. She could not tell why she asked the question. But it lashed Dunstane into a fury.

"Kill the little thing?... I?... I?... Why did you go?... Why did you leave her?... I told you she was ill... You went on writing... You let your child die for a miserable twenty pounds!... It is you that killed her!..."

"I . . . killed . . . Dollie?"

"Yes, you! You, with your confounded writing. The child never had a chance... even before she was born... A pretty mother you have been!... How was she to live, shut up here all day while you wrote?... I told you

yesterday she was ill . . . Did you stop? . . . Write, write, write! — all night — all day . . . You need not have left her just now . . . but you must get your damned money! . . . Why did you leave me to see her die? . . ."

Priscilla crushed the child to her bosom . . . "If I had been here my baby would not have died." She lifted her head with a strange jerking motion. Her voice was calm.

- "Don't I tell you so! . . . Isn't that what I am saying! . . . My God! to lie helpless . . . and the child in convulsions . . ."
- "I think, Dunstane, in your place . . ." her voice rang strangely even and dispassionate after his uncontrolled fury . . . "I would have called Mr. Malden . . . He would not have let Dollie die."
- "Called?... I shouted myself hoarse!... I tried to knock on the wall... No one heard me... and the little thing... the little thing..."
- "I think I will go away now, Dunstane." She spoke wearily.

She stood up, tall and pale. A patch of colour stained each cheek, her lips were purple, showing the white teeth. She held the child to her bosom smiling.

Dunstane put his hands over his eyes. "What

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do you look like that for? What are you smiling at? Have you no heart?... Yes, go away... You drive me mad... I can't bear to see you..."

She went into the kitchen and sat gazing at Dollie with eyes that remembered. She was living over again the happiness of that Sunday afternoon when she had shown her baby to her friends. There had been warmth and love and flowers around her . . . The lark had sung in the window . . . though it was November.

The kitchen was bare to-day—naked boards, bare dresser, fireless grate... Outside the heat was stifling. Inside, Dollie was ice in her arms.

"It's like mother's little byby, wot died."

She felt again the child's voice, a knife in her heart. It clashed against that song of Dollie going to the sun. Had she killed her little baby? . . . Was it she who had given her the face of a dead child before she was born? Dollie had lain so warm under her heart . . . she had not been cold then . . . like this . . .

There were voices in the next room . . . She could hear them—Dunstane's shrill and pitiful, . . . Malden's hoarse answers.

By-and-by he came in . . . He shivered as he

saw Priscilla and the child . . . this was what he had painted — this woman with Calvary in her eye, gazing on her dead. Her eyes clung to the pity on his face . . . She smiled that strange smile.

He knelt down beside her and took Dollie's little hand, stroking it softly.

"I think you loved my little baby," she whispered.

"My dear! . . . my dear!"

He laid his head down on her knee beside the child's, and his grief went to Priscilla's heart, but she did not cry. She touched his hair, soothing him.

* * * * *

All night long she sat there, holding the child. Dunstane had gone to bed; but her friends could not leave her. They were in the sitting-room—Gertrude, Mrs. Markham, Miss Cardrew, Malden. They kept a sorrowful watch with her . . . though Priscilla wanted no one but Dollie . . .

* * * * *

"Now, my dear, have a sup of tea, do! And give me the little thing . . . You shouldn't take on like this. It's time she was laid out decent, little heart!"

The morning had come.

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Priscilla lifted her heavy eyes to Mrs. Markham, but she held Dollie closer.

"I hadn't time to hold her when she wanted me... Now I have three days... three whole days... three days and three nights in the heart of the earth... with Dollie."

* * * * *

But even those three days were denied her.

They were taking Dollie to Frodsham.

"I should like her to lie in the sun," Priscilla said, "under the south wall, close beside my own mother... It won't be so lonely."

Miss Cardrew and Malden were going to Frodsham with her. Gertrude would stop with Dunstane.

It was Malden who took Dollie from Priscilla at the last, and laid the baby in the white cradle of death.

Miss Cardrew drew her away to put on cloak and hat. Then they all gathered in the sittingroom round the little coffin.

Dunstane had turned his head aside; Mrs. Markham had gone out to weep over her dead.

Through the open window came the sounds of a barrel organ and the clash of chimes from St. Pancras'. Some one was being married.

Malden drew down the window, but the merry notes would not be silenced. "Sing," he whispered to Gertrude.

Her lips opened, and a fugitive line from the *Elijah* came, borne on the chimes.

"And He shall give thee thy heart's desires . . . And He shall give thee . . ."

Her voice broke and failed.

* * * *

Malden carried Dollie up the main street of Frodsham, past the window where the three Miss Speaights stood, not recognising Priscilla... past the shop with the name Momerie still over the door, past the shuttered Rectory into the churchyard.

The sexton met them under the lych-gate. The Rector had gone abroad, and the curate never read the service over an unbaptised infant... But everything else was ready...

"My poor, poor darling!" Miss Cardrew's tears flowed.

"It doesn't matter," said Priscilla. "Dollie will lie in the sun."

They stood watching the little mound grow ... so fast ... so fast ... There was a wreath of Alpine roses on the grave beside it. Then

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Malden put his arm in Priscilla's . . . but she drew away, looking back.

They turned again, and stood where the grass had been flattened down by the little feet that had never pressed earth before.

"I should like to say a prayer over Dollie," she whispered . . . "but I can't remember . . . I can't remember." She pressed her hands over her eyes . . . then she looked up. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . the love of God . . . and . . . and . . . Oh, what comes after?"

"The life everlasting, Amen," sobbed Miss Cardrew.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. MARKHAM'S TWINS.

PRISCILLA had lived through July, and now August had come. The city was hot and still and stifling. The trees bordering the streets were grey with dust; the people under them were grey too; their clothes shabbier and dirtier in the searching light of a glaring sun. Those who could escape had gone out of town; only the very poor and the very busy and the very hopeless passed along the streets. And London lay panting in the sun, in a gasping wretchedness that knew nothing of the airy promise of the spring. But Priscilla did not notice it. Her gaze was turned inward on her empty heart; she only felt that the city had grown suddenly empty.

It had grown silent too. The moan of the great sea no longer sounded in her ears; a child's wail filled the silence. She held out her arms in her loneliness: they missed the sorrowful life around her and touched Dollie's cold face. She

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passed the people in the streets. They were miles away from her. She saw their hopeless faces, and she thought wearily they were not as hopeless as she. They had not lost Dollie.

She seldom went out, nursing her trouble indoors, in silence, and a reserve that was a wall of ice between herself and sympathy. Her eyes showed her misery, but none of her friends could find words that would comfort.

Priscilla's thoughts of Dollie's grave were hedged about with a memory of the words she had said: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God," but they had lost meaning for her. She looked at the drama of human life, and she was filled with a great bitterness. "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward," she said to herself; and as the sparks fly upward and die out, so man strains upward to die in darkness. To be born, to weep, to disappear—what a poor little play it is!

The oblivion of grief enwrapped her. In her thought of the dead she sank into a dreamy forgetfulness of the living. Life slipped past. Time glided through the shadows—a shade himself; Priscilla did not see him. She was tasting the deadly poison of inaction; it numbed her brain, giving her the pleasure of the lotus-eater,

with the dulness of the lotus-eater. She forgot the sweetness of love, the joy of doing. She blinded her eyes to the beauty that enthusiasm throws around life's monotony; she turned her back on sacrifice that opened the doors into another life.

The gravity of eternal things shadowed her with an austere and terrible sadness, unrelieved by any light of hope. The secrets of life and death were a yawning abyss into which her dim eyes peered. Up from those ghastly depths jutted the sharp rocks of destiny and fate, and her eyes saw nothing beside. They missed the shining bridge of the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God" thrown right across the chasm. It was the shortest road by which to reach Dollie, but she would not see it. had lost faith in love; and losing faith in love she had lost faith in life. Life seemed to walk beside her with the old face, the old form, but it was a phantom. Life itself was dead. must hope in something if we live," and she had no hope.

She had been as weak as the women round her, who let themselves go and became slipshod and slatternly when life proved too hard for them. She was still outwardly self-respecting; but her

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heart was down at heel, trailing through the day in rags.

And the more she yielded to her inaction, the harder and colder she became to those around her; to Dunstane especially, who had turned from his Great Work to his Great Loss. All day long he wailed cheerfully over his grief, maddening Priscilla. He gave voice to her thoughts, and his words made her own sorrow seem as unreal and extravagant as his. He had lost his interest in life, he said . . . his one hope . . . his great joy . . . There was nothing left to live for, to work for. Dollie had inspired all that was high in his life . . . and now that she was gone . . .

His moods were elegiac;—every period was an Ode to Infant Mortality. His eloquence purred contentedly above the little dead child. All day his tears streamed. He robbed Priscilla of the sacred savour of her love. She began to wonder if her own grief had not the same quality of exaggeration.

Analysis kills emotion as it kills love;—Priscilla started up breathless, with clenched hands and appealing eyes, for now indeed she had lost her little baby.

Then the agony died from her eyes, her hands

unlocked; she sat down again, white and mute, to listen to Dunstane. The loss was all his... Priscilla had compensations... besides, she had never loved the child... She had been content to leave her to him while she pursued her fatal chase after money...

Her heart hardened as he talked. She could not forgive him, hearing the incessant creaking of the wordy cradle in which he rocked his grief.

It was Miss Cardrew who led him from the cradle-side into the wastes of the New Religion.

When the sofa was once more strewn with papers, when the women came once more to gaze and wonder and admire, the Great Work laid its hands upon Mr. Momerie with a benediction of forgetfulness.

Then Priscilla was free to nurse her sorrow undisturbed by her husband's lamentations. But her freedom came too late. Her thoughts held a mocking echo of Dunstane's jeremiads. The phrases in which her grief was dressed were tattered remnants of the crape he had used.

She despised him now for his easy forgetfulness; yet she followed his example and threw herself into work in order to forget.

She kept the rooms clean and orderly as before.

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It only cost weary limbs to be tidy, and afterwards the neatness was restful. It was a relief to come into a clean house from the grime of the street.

When the housework was done she sat at the bureau writing. Sometimes she would forget and turn round to look at Dollie. Sometimes she started up;—it was time for the baby's dinner. It was a cruel forgetfulness that work brought her... Dunstane wondered at the pleasure she took in the clean rooms and in her writing. "She has no heart," he said to himself. "It has made no difference to her; she only cares for money and comfort."

So the breach between them opened again.

"Priscilla, my dear, may I have a little conversation with you in private?"

Miss Cardrew had a mysterious importance about her that gave hostages to surmise; but Priscilla's blank face avoided questions. She led the way into the kitchen, Miss Cardrew bobbing after her.

It was November—a day full of colour;—it was the blaze of the year flaring up before it sank into grey ashes. There was a ghostly brilliancy in the sunset, an unveiling of red clouds, stormy

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and suggestive. Fronting the window Priscilla's face was suddenly bright.

"No, I won't sit down, my dear. I wished to tell you... You have not heard the news, then?"

The little spinster's eyes twinkled eagerly as they read the girl's face.

- "I have heard nothing," said Priscilla in a voice that said she cared to hear nothing.
- "Have you not?... Well, that is strange, remarkably strange... to think I should have heard the news before you... Will you guess what it is, Priscilla?"

Priscilla's dull eyes quenched Miss Cardrew's gaiety.

- "My dear Priscilla," she said solemnly, "Mrs. Markham has twins."
- "Has she?" said Priscilla, without a spark of interest in her voice.
- "She has indeed . . . I ought perhaps to apologise for disturbing you . . . but I thought you would be interested, my dear."
 - "Yes," said Priscilla.

Miss Cardrew, blinking at her, thought it was the red light that had brought a sudden haggardness into her face.

"Well, my dear . . . I must go now. For-

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give my calling you away. The subject was not quite an appropriate one to discuss before your dear husband; there is a certain delicacy in mentioning twins. One must observe the proprieties in order to maintain a sense of . . . of sexual differences."

"Yes," Priscilla said again monotonously.

But when Miss Cardrew had hobbled away the apathy fell from her face and a hungry look came into her eyes. She walked up and down restlessly, her feet dragging when they neared the door. The new little babies in the flat below took hold of her. Her thoughts were bitter. Twins to Mrs. Markham, already overburdened with five, while she whose arms were empty must bear her desolation . . .

She paced up and down, and the more she thought the more she longed to see the tiny creatures. She had not held a baby since Dollie died. She trembled at the idea of another child in her arms;—she dreaded the sight of a little unfamiliar face bringing back memory . . . And yet she wanted to go; her heart urged her to go. She lifted her head, pressing her hand to her throat, choking back the feeling that Miss Cardrew's news had roused. She had been getting used to the emptiness of her life; but the thought

of the twins was a stone plumbing the depths of her loss.

She stopped her march to listen . . . perhaps she would hear a cry . . . But everything was silent. And why should she not go?

It was only the bitterness of her thoughts that kept her. The hardness that encrusted her heart steeled her against the woman more fortunate than herself.

Fortunate? She laughed harshly. To Mrs. Markham every child she bore was a burden pressing her down;—and twins!... "To him that hath shall be given," Priscilla said very bitterly. And because she had lost everything she could not bear to see the woman to whom life granted children more abundantly.

No, she would not go!

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CHAPTER XVIII.

A GIFT.

FOR the rest of that day she was restless and miserable: her nerves strained. She listened to every sound, longing to hear the cry that would remind her of Dollie, fearing lest the voice would pierce her heart. Evening found her still on the She moved from room to room telling herself she could not go down to Mrs. Markham, and yet unable to settle to anything. She unlocked the box in which she kept Dollie's clothes, and looked through them yearningly. It was like opening the grave, and brought back the heaviness of heart she had suffered. She longed with a terrible longing to have her baby again.

She moved from the box and stood hesitating in the room; then, not giving herself time to think, she ran downstairs and stood outside the door of Mrs. Markham's flat listening. Everything was quiet; no sound helped her own desire to turn the handle and go in. The impulse died away. She stood, a hunted look in her eyes,

listening. She leaned forward and laid her face against the door with a caressing softness; then she sprang away and darted up the steps. Halfway up she paused and, after a moment's hesitation, turned back and went down again slowly and lingeringly, her face very haggard and pitiful. She stood close against the door and stroked it softly as if it had been a living face; and while she stood there a tiny wail assailed her ears. At the first weak note the blood rushed to Priscilla's face. She turned the handle and went in.

Mrs. Gibson sat by the fire rocking a child on her knee. Priscilla darted down upon her and lifted the little bundle and held it to her face and laughed and cried at once.

"And I'm sure, Mrs. Momerie, I've been hexpecting of you hever since I knowed it were twins; and I said to Mrs. Markham, I said, hinfants was that contrairy, goin' where they wasn't wanted and not goin' where a woman would give 'er heyes to 'ave them. And I'm sure a pore woman with five of a family could ha' done without one, let alone the pair. But there! it's always the way. As Mr. Groves read in church last week, 'visiting the sins of the fathers upon the mothers,' which I've said many a time it's a sin and a shame . . ."

A GIFT.

"I'm sure I can't tell why Providence should punish me like this," said Mrs. Markham feebly from the bed. "It's bad enough to tell Markham there's one acoming, but twins is enough to drive any man to the public."

Priscilla's eyes sprang from one to the other. Her arms were tight round the baby, her heart was beating so fast she could not speak. All the feeling and love suppressed since Dollie's death had broken loose again, overwhelming her. The child in her arms, life surged again in a happy tumult through her veins.

"And clothes not enough for one, let alone two," Mrs. Markham went on sighing, "and five mouths already, and Markham worse than a dozen, owing to the drink."

"There hain't no justice in it," said Mrs. Gibson viciously, "and I could wish it was the man wot 'ad the children to bear. A woman 'as enough to put up with in a 'usband, let alone the children. Men is brutes so long as it don't cost 'em anything. And I'm sure I don't know how you're to tell Markham it's twins."

Priscilla's eyes grew round as she listened. The tears in them dried unbidden.

"Mrs. Markham," she cried in a thin, high voice, "are you sorry they are twins?"

Mrs. Markham wiped her eyes with the corner of the sheet.

"You see, Mrs. Momerie, two is more than one pair o' harms can carry, and there's only Susie to see to them when I am aworkin'... I never was one to talk agen Providence, and I'd ha' said nothing to another baby... but twins! It don't seem right to arst a woman to put up with twins."

Priscilla's eyes were eager with a dry brilliancy.

"Mrs. Markham," she cried shrilly, "give me one of them—a little baby for my very own. I will love it like Dollie, and you shall never have any more trouble. Oh, you will say yes! You don't want the two; and I! oh, I can't tell you how I long and long and long to have a little baby of my own."

"Ah, poor dear!" sighed Mrs. Gibson.

Mrs. Markham was silent: her eyes were fixed greedily on the baby in Priscilla's arms.

"That's the little b'y," she said; "I don't know as 'ow I could spare the little b'y. B'ys look after theirsels when they grows up."

Priscilla gave the child to Mrs. Gibson and stepped quickly to the bed, and leaned over Mrs. Markham to take the other twin.

"I don't want the boy, I would rather have the girl," she cried eagerly. "Oh, you will make me so happy if you will give her to me, Mrs. Markham."

But Mrs. Markham pushed Priscilla away with one arm while she held the baby with the other.

"I don't see as I can part with the gel," she said. "Gels is allus useful about a 'ouse."

The light on Priscilla's face died down.

- "I do so want a little baby of my own," she said, her lips trembling. "And I would love yours, if you would . . ."
- "And I'm sure it's just flyin' in the face o' Providence if you don't give up the gel," said Mrs. Gibson's rasping voice. "You can't rear them both, and Mrs. Momerie will be a mother if any one will . . ."
- "It hain't that," said Mrs. Markham faintly, but I don't know as I can spare the gel..."

 Priscilla clasped her hands together.
 - "Then let me have the boy . . ."

She stepped towards Mrs. Gibson, but Mrs. Markham stopped her sharply.

- "I don't know as I can spare the b'y . . ."
- "You're a hungrateful woman," said Mrs. Gibson angrily, "and you've got no more'n you deserve . . . And next year I shouldn't wonder if

it hain't triplers. When a woman begins with twins ten to one she goes on to triplers, and the Queen's bounty don't make up for three on your hands at once, no it don't; as you will find, and wish you 'adn't ha' flown in the face o' Providence takin' one off your 'ands this year . . ."

Mrs. Gibson stopped breathless, and Mrs. Markham hesitated.

- "If I could be sure o' that . . ."
- "Them is things we can't be sure on," said Mrs. Gibson; "and if we could be sure o' hall that follers wot we does, there's a many of us would live decent."
- "Mrs. Markham," Priscilla struck in, "if you would give me one you should see it every day and nurse it, and have it when you liked, only you would let it live with me, and let it be my little baby, and let me have it to love and to . . ."

Her sobs prevented the end of the sentence.

- "Now 'ush, my dear," said Mrs. Gibson. "Cryin' never yet mended a broken pot, as I've said to Jimmy many a time."
- "I can't abear to see you takin' on," said Mrs. Markham, crying herself. "And you can 'ave one o' the twins. You can 'ave wot one you want, Mrs. Momerie, and I'll shet my eyes

while you has your chice, and please take it with you before I see you going."

She handed the little girl to Priscilla, then turned away and drew the bedclothes over her head.

Priscilla gave one rapturous look at the little face; then, without a glance at the boy on Mrs. Gibson's lap, she ran from the flat and did not stop until she was safely in her own room. box with Dollie's clothes was open. and sobbing, her hands trembling with excitement, she undressed the baby and put on it the garments she had made for her baby; and when her work was finished she clasped the child to her bosom, smiling through her tears, and ran to the sitting-room to her husband.

"O Dunstane! look at my little baby! my Dollie come back again!" little own baby!

Dunstane looked up wearily.

"What a child you are, Priscilla! brat have you got there?"

Priscilla's arms closed round the baby.

"It's mine, my very own little Dollie. Mrs. Markham has given her to me."

Dunstane raised himself on his elbow, and looked at his wife.

"You are carrying your foolishness too far, 193

Priscilla. Take the child down again. My head aches. I can't be bothered by babies."

Priscilla looked blankly at him.

"Dunstane, don't you understand? She is mine. I am going to have her instead of Dollie . . . Would you like to hold her a minute?"

Dunstane waved his hand and turned away, speaking softly and reluctantly.

- "I don't expect you to have any feelings, Priscilla, you never loved Dollie; but I must ask you not to torture me. If you are heartless enough to wish to give another child Dollie's place in our home, I at least will not consent to it."
- "But, Dunstane . . ." She stared at him, not believing her ears.

He waved his hand again.

- "Take that child away . . . The sight of her breaks my heart!"
- "I will keep her in the other rooms . . . You shall never see her," Priscilla gasped.
- "That is enough, Priscilla. I will not have a beggar's brat in the place of Dollie."
- "Do you mean I am to give her back?" Priscilla asked hotly.
 - "I have already clearly stated what I mean."

A GIFT.

She went out of the room carrying the baby, rebellion hot in her heart. But she would not yield. The child was hers, and Dunstane should not take it away.

She sat down holding the little thing close, her love for the child overcoming her anger at Dunstane. She felt human again; the touch of the tiny hands, the sight of the little face, had melted her frozen heart.

"I can't give her up, I can't! I can't!" she sobbed.

The door opened and she looked up, to see Mrs. Gibson peeping in. The woman stepped gingerly and spoke in a loud whisper.

"I didn't want as Mr. Momerie should 'ear me; and I've come for the baby. Its mother's takin' on as never was. She won't give it hup not to nobody, and oh, dear me! what a fluster she's in, to be sure, and the milk turning. So you'll jest 'ave to let me take it down again, Mrs. Momerie."

Priscilla lifted her white face.

- "I can't! I can't! I want her! See, I've put Dollie's clothes on her... I want my little baby again."
- "I doubt you'll 'ave to want 'er, Mrs. Momerie. 'Er pore mother will kill 'erself frettin',

and the children too, if I don't take 'er back. So jest let 'er come quiet, and you can step in and nurse 'em and play with 'em when you wants to."

Priscilla allowed Mrs. Gibson to lift the baby; but when the door had closed upon her she threw herself on the bed and cried heart-brokenly.

A few hours after a pale and miserable Priscilla crept down to Mrs. Markham's flat with a bundle of babies' clothes for the twins. But she would not go in to see them.

CHAPTER XIX.

LONDON, WEST.

AT Piccadilly Circus Miss Cardrew and Gertrude alighted from the 'bus. The expectation on their faces showed also in their walk, and in the eyes that pounced on every detail of the street;—in their dresses too.

Gertrude was fresh and dainty as the May morning. Miss Cardrew's eager old face with the colours washed out, her faded figure, her white front, and shiny black silk made a foil to the pretty girl.

More than one man turned to stare at them as they hesitated before fording the traffic.

The flower-girls sat on the fountain steps, their baskets heaped with the spring;—yellow daffodils, purple-lidded violets, primroses that smiled, blood-red anemone, and laughing crocus. Malden had taught Gertrude to notice the value of colour.

"Isn't it pretty?" She smiled at Miss Cardrew; to-day everything made her smile.

It was the first Monday in May, and they were going with the crowd to the Academy. This sacrifice they were making in honour of Malden's success.

"A Nineteenth-Century Madonna" had been hung on the line. He had captured his bird sooner than he had hoped for . . . the fluttering thing was in his hand, but the plumage was red with death.

Miss Cardrew saw only the triumph and came with eager joy to share it. If Gertrude's hand touching his had been stained too, the stain was hidden by her glove. It fitted perfectly, was eloquent of the pretty hand it covered.

He had taken Priscilla to the private view. Gertrude and Miss Cardrew made one of the unimposing crowd—the well-dressed, well-fed crowd that the spring tides wash up on the flood of London life, pressing back the wintry waters that moan eastward.

There was a block before Malden's picture. The two women waited to edge themselves in.

Miss Cardrew's eyes were blinking, dazzled by a World in big sleeves and a "picture" hat. Under the powder and spotted veil it was difficult to discover the Flesh. The third person of this Trinity was, for the time being, skied. Near the same barrier Malden had stood; but there had been neither pride nor triumph on his face... He had been thinking of his dead bird.

A cleft in the throng made it possible for Gertrude and Miss Cardrew to get within sight of the picture.

Yes; it was Priscilla, big-eyed and wan as they had known her lately . . . Priscilla and her little baby.

"She looked just like that when she sat holding her dear little dead child . . . Yet the picture was painted before Dollie was taken from her," Miss Cardrew whispered.

Gertrude nodded. They stood in silence listening to the remarks of the people about them;
—some of them fell like lashes on raw flesh.

- "Oh yes, clever enough, a lot of this new art is . . . but I don't believe in it . . . The whole thing is unwholesome, morbid . . . Can't get away from it nowadays: fiction, life, fashion . . . The age is suffering from green sickness."
- "All the same there is strength in its realism . . . pathos too . . . look at the woman's eyes . . ."
- "Leave realism to life. Art should glad-den."

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- "When art teaches she may have to use the birch."
- "She should use it on herself, and let the parson preach."
- "The age is too delicate to go to church...
 But that is a fine picture... best thing I've seen yet."
- "What a fright! Her frock is twelve miles behind the fashion . . . and that awful little baby!"
- "I hate those hungry-looking women, don't you? She looks as if she wanted plenty of beeftea and port wine . . . Women like that have no business to bring babies into the world."
- "How terrible! They shouldn't paint such pictures... so unnatural too! Who ever saw flesh like that?... But that high light is good..."
 - 'A nineteenth-century madonna indeed!
 - "'Lo, here,' said He,
 'The images ye have made of Me.'"
 - * * * *
 - "It is quite impressionist, I think."
 - "Oh, quite. It's excellent—if one could get

far enough away from it to see it properly. But you can't appreciate that sort of thing if you are too near it."

"Really, that is too ridiculous!—a woman starving, and a dead child on her lap. Things like that don't happen in the nineteenth century.
... Our poor-rate system ..."

Miss Cardrew's lips were twitching. She could be silent no longer. She turned, facing the critics, and her eyes were ablaze and indignant.

"I assure you," she said in her high little voice, "things like that do happen nowadays... That is our dear Priscilla, and that is her beloved little Dollie who died because she lived in Buildings where she could not get air or sun. Babies who live in Buildings die there, you know, and their dear mothers' hearts break... while you laugh..."

- "Oh, hush!" Gertrude plucked at her gown.
- "The woman is mad!"

A lady levelled her lorgnette at her

"Oh no, indeed, I assure you I am not mad." Miss Cardrew addressed the lorgnette . . . "I greatly fear it is you who are mad . . . mad and blind, and lifeless, and heartless . . . people of the

gay world who live with their heads buried in gold, and see nothing of the want and hunger and despair that are killing hundreds of poor women and dear little babies round you... Your children die and you comfort yourselves, and your bleeding hearts, thinking everything was done to save them... It was God's will.... It is not God's will that one of the least of these little ones should perish. They die because nothing is done for them... When death comes to you it is covered up by flowers;—poor women see only the hard boards of the coffin..."

The very unexpectedness of the address startled them into attention. Some of them listened smiling; some pressed forward to look at her—the grotesque little person from the east end!—some fell back and went their way:—"Crazy, no doubt of it."

Miss Cardrew faced them bravely till she stopped breathless. Then she tottered away into the deserted water-colour room, and sat down on one of the seats. When Gertrude came up she was shaking with excitement, her white front bobbing about under her bonnet.

She looked up with a deprecating air.

"My dear, you must forgive me. It was unconventional, I know, indeed highly improper

LONDON, WEST.

- ... but I am glad I said it ... I could not stand in silence to hear them making such strictures on our dear Priscilla."
- "I am glad you said it!" said Gertrude passionately. "Oh, I am glad I am a poor person ... I am glad I know what it is to strive, and work, and fail . . . It is better to live in Buildings, in touch with death that makes you feel the life round you, than to be like these women. They look at life through an opera-glass . . . "
- "I don't like the Buildings, my dear . . . And it is good to have a little money . . ."
- "I don't want money-to be rich! people don't hear the whole gamut of life . . . They touch a few notes; -but the heights and the depths-they can't even imagine them . . . It is better to be poor as I am . . . "
- " My dear. no one would call you poor."
- "No, that is because of this frock . . . I shall never wear it again . . . Fashion is the livery of the heartless."
- "But, my dear, you mistake. They were not all heartless . . . I saw some in tears . . . and that man who quoted Lowell . . . he looked a religious man . . ."
 - "Yes, I saw . . . he looked religious; but you 203

can't tell... I think religion is the vault in which people lay their dead consciences..."

They sat there watching the ebb and flow of the tide. In this room there was nothing unconventional—nothing to strike the moan of reality through the gay ripple of the current.

- "The picture is evidently a success, considered artistically," said Miss Cardrew. "Our dear young friend must be very pleased... and indeed we all share in his joy..."
 - "Pleased!" Gertrude cried bitterly.

She had seen Malden's face in its triumph; and the hopelessness of her love helped her to understand the bitterness of his success.

CHAPTER XX.

A POOR THING.

DUNSTANE'S refusal to let his wife keep Mrs. Markham's baby roused more indignation in Priscilla's heart than almost any action of his that had preceded it. She could not forgive his selfishness, nor the small regard he showed for her feelings. And Dunstane, conscious that he had wounded her unnecessarily, resented her silence, and betook himself to sulking and to sharp words, —so widening more and more the breach between them.

There was a weary hopelessness on her face all through the winter; and the spring brought something into her eyes that frightened Gertrude and maddened the man who loved her and who was watching the tragedy that was being enacted at No. 30.

Since Dollie's death Malden had grown reserved and cold. He saw less of the Momeries, though he found time for many little kindnesses to Dunstane that made the days easier for Priscilla.

Through the winter his At Homes had been an institution. Priscilla and Dunstane went with the others; and Dunstane talked, making dreamy disciples to his New Religion. He was not living in vain, he said. He was teaching these young men a high philosophy; it was worth more to them than a knowledge of the classics...

If Priscilla asked him what practical effect his teaching had upon their lives, he was ready with a twin query: What practical effect had a Greek play upon life? All the advantages she claimed for the play he claimed for his philosophy... And who could gainsay him?

To the people at Malden's evenings Priscilla talked no more of her Book of the Great City. When she talked at all, and it was very seldom, she whirled them round in a mad dance of drollery... But the light in her eyes did not dance. The hollow mirth drummed cruelly on Malden's ears. Gertrude could have cried as she watched her. Miss Cardrew was so very thankful our dear Priscilla was recovering a little of her old gaiety.

She was changed in other ways. Malden had some new models . . . fascinating Persian kittens. She never noticed them.

When she saw his picture hanging on the line

at Burlington House she said: "Yes, it is a good likeness. I am just like that now...only without my little baby."

He set his lips, and grew more cold and reserved.

Sometimes with Miss Cardrew she would be more like her old self. Up in the bare room, with nothing beside her but the little spinster's tenderness, the softness would come back to her face, the love to her eyes. She shared scraps of talk with Cardie, sitting on the rug with her head on her knee.

- "Cardie dear, do I look like a poor thing?"
- "A poor thing, Priscilla?"
- "Yes, one of those poor things that is stamped 'Poor Thing' till the very 'bus-man knows her, and flicks his whip at her, winking to the man behind."
 - "You, my dear Priscilla!"
- "I didn't think I looked like it . . . I have been going about by myself all this time, and no one ever dared . . . But yesterday a man spoke to me . . ."
- "Dear Priscilla, don't let us talk of it... These subjects are not quite suitable... It is not as if I were married... What did you do under the very painful circumstance, my dear?"

- "I did nothing . . . I said . . . Damn!"
- "Priscilla!...Oh, my dear, indeed, indeed you shock me!...a pupil of mine...And what did he do?"
 - "He ran . . . but he lifted his hat first."
- "My dear, it was a very terrible expression for a lady to use . . ."
- "Was it?... Cardie dear, I think if every woman said 'Damn' when a bad man spoke to her there would be fewer bad men in the world..."
- "I think you are right, Priscilla . . . and . . . and I will try to say it if any one ever speaks to me . . ."

The little spinster's face was flushed; she looked a hero facing battle.

- "I have just completed my story about you, my dear. I am anxious to know what the reviewers will say to it . . ."
- "It depends on their cooks, doesn't it? and on the balance at their banker's, and on the sort of women they have married . . . But it must be nice to have reviews . . . to know that your work is worthy of notice."
 - "My dear, people notice your stories . . . "
- "As they notice the advertisements in the stations . . ."

A POOR THING.

- "And some day you will write a story that we shall all be proud of . . ."
- "Never now! I have nothing to write for . . . Cardie dear, you predicted wrongly . . . Failure is on everything I have done!"
 - "Not everything, Priscilla . . . "
- "Yes, everything! everything!" She sat up, speaking passionately. "I look round... What do I see for my life?... Nothing, nothing!... Only the years that the locust hath eaten..."
 - "But. my dear . . ."
- "Wait!... you shall see them too...
 Look! My first success!... I got that because human nature loves mud... The locusts fell upon my book and fattened... I spend my time writing stories that humiliate me... I am a 'Poor Thing'; I live by my shame. The locusts again!... Then Dollie was coming, and how happy I was! I could give her nothing but a merry heart; she should have that!... Cardie dear, did you ever see a more pitiful sight than my little baby?... the locusts ate her before she was born..." She went on fiercely...
 "But I had her little white face to kiss, her little hands... Now I haven't even her clothes..."

"Your dear husband's love," said Miss Cardrew, choking.

Priscilla's silence was an open grave. She laid her head on Miss Cardrew's knee again.

"I did so want a little thing of my own," she moaned . . . "And now Dollie is dead . . . and I shall never have another . . . I shall never have another . . ."

She raised her head. Her eyes stared into the blank future.

Miss Cardrew found nothing to say . . . The lark chirped feebly in his cage . . .

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ANGELS ARE VEILED.

MISS CARDREW was in the skimpy dressing-gown when Malden told her the news, but that did not prevent her hurrying down to No. 30. Quite unmindful of the fact—glaringly obvious to-day—that she possessed legs, she sat on a high chair by the sofa, her feet dangling, her white front awry, her spectacles very dim, a great gladness in her kind old eyes. Priscilla—twisted round from the bureau—was listening, her face grey and wan. She looked older than Miss Cardrew.

"Yes, indeed, it is really wonderful," Miss Cardrew went on. "Gertrude had the telegram a few minutes ago. She went at once. Madame Lomaz is ill, and the concert is to-night... The Queen's Hall. Only think of little Gertrude singing in the Queen's Hall! It is nearly as good as the Albert Hall—indeed better, from the point of view of sex... I trust she will acquit herself creditably while her voice is being

tested just now... She has very little time for preparation... But then it is only one song... Mr. Malden is going to put off his journey till to-morrow in order to be present..." The little spinster babbled on.

Priscilla's face awoke: she was really pleased. It was good to know that Gertrude had this chance: she had worked hard for it these three years . . .

But hard work had not won the chance for Gertrude.

It was some time now since one of the men who came to Malden's At Homes, a journalist, had been diligently sowing paragraphs in the papers about the new soprano, Miss Gertrude Tennant. Wherever her name could be dragged into a newspaper it appeared.

Everything about her was recorded—her youth, her beauty, her charm, her wonderful voice; even the eccentricity which made her live in workmen's buildings, where she sang for sick children and invalids, and was the star of the Bohemian evenings given by Malden, the artist, whose celebrated picture, etc., etc.... It all sounded very well. People began to wonder if they had heard Miss Tennant, ... and if not, why not? ... Little Newsome spent a good

deal of time in posting the paragraphs, marked with blue pencil, to concert managers; and in casually mentioning Miss Tennant's name in influential quarters.

To-day he had his reward. Gertrude had been sent for to supply the place of Madame Lomaz at a Queen's Hall concert.

Dunstane found Miss Cardrew's enthusiasm irritating . . . She had not a word for him: and what did she mean by appearing before him in that ridiculous garment?... The light on Priscilla's face set fire to his irritation. He might write for ever and ever, and she would not give him a spark of the interest she showed in Gertrude's petty triumph . . . Besides, why should success come to all the world and not to him? There was Malden with a picture he had not taken a month to paint-talked of everywhere. The girl had a voice; and they made as much fuss of it as though to amuse people was the greatest thing in life . . . He had worked for years to give a new faith and a new hope to the world, and he was left neglected and unnoticed.

He was not well... Miss Cardrew's gleeful chatter bored him. When the door closed upon her he told Priscilla not to let that woman come near him again—she got on his nerves.

All day long he fretted Priscilla. She could do nothing. He interrupted her work every few minutes. The errands he made for her were endless. She toiled up and down the long flights of stairs all the morning; but nothing she did pleased him.

Priscilla's face grew more weary with every journey, but she did not complain. She did her duty to Dunstane, though the zest had gone out of her work for him. The bitterness she cherished against him reacted upon every part of her life. She had so wanted a little baby, and when the miracle had happened, and another had been sent to take Dollie's place, Dunstane had refused to consent to her happiness. She forgot that Mrs. Markham had taken back her gift; the bitterness was all for Dunstane, and she could not forgive him.

And so there existed an open estrangement between the two. Each recognised that the marriage had been a mistake. Each would gladly have parted from the other, but circumstances held them bound. Dunstane was selfishly dependent on his wife. Priscilla's idea of marriage was that of a life union, "for better, for worse." The light had failed in her life, but she walked through the darkness clinging to the

hand of the angel Duty. Only thus was it possible for her to bear with her husband. Since the child's death Dunstane had made no pretence of love for Priscilla. He was sometimes brutal in his frank disregard of her. This morning he was in a notably ungracious mood. Gertrude's bright face at the door, announcing that she was to sing that night, made him sulk.

The girl ran away to practise, and they heard her for hours after. Her song was Kingsley's "Oh that we two were Maying!" and the familiar air racked Dunstane's nerves.

The song set Priscilla's heart on a mad gallop to be out in the sunshine of the May morning. Out of the Buildings echoing with children's cries and women's strained voices and the struggle of life... Out of the terrible city, whose pitilessness was slowly killing her. Out from the sight of Dunstane's face and the sound of Dunstane's peevishness. Out from the three rooms that had ceased to be home and were only the prison in which she walked the treadmill of life. Out into sun and air!... Oh to be on the moors again, with the spicy breath of pine and heather about her, and the glad freedom of cloud and bird promising liberty! Oh for the spring of moss and turf under her weary feet, and the

sight of delicate green of spray and bud! Oh for girlhood again, and freedom, and the merry heart that had gone all the way! And oh for life that had never known failure and disillusion and pain and death!

"O God, give me back my past!" she sobbed.

There was no sound of any that answered—
only the voice from upstairs; and the words of
the song weighting the air like a heavy perfume:

"Oh that we two were Maying
Down the stream of the soft spring breeze;
Like children with young flowers playing
In the shade of the whispering trees!
Oh that we two sat dreaming
On the sward of some sheep-trimmed down.
Watching the white mist stealing
Over river and mead and town!...

Priscilla lifted her head with a sudden gasp for air: the grip of the city was on her throat; she was being strangled. It was this that was killing her—the daily struggle against a power absolute in its inevitableness; the awful potency of the massed misery of London.

"Oh that we two were Maying!...
Watching the white mist stealing."

It was so long since she had seen anything but brick and pavement and fog. Even the sun fell half-heartedly, grudgingly, on the London

streets . . . She had not seen field nor sky, not since Dollie was buried . . . She had seen the sky then-it had smiled an echo of that "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God." But since that day her feet had wandered into dark places . . .

By and by Malden came in, quiet and casual as he had been lately. Priscilla's heart flying to him fell stunned against his glassy re-Yet his words looked kindly enough from behind the screen.

He had three stalls for the concert. Cardrew was going with him, and he hoped—he thought Mrs. Momerie ought to see Miss Tennant make her bow to success.

Priscilla's face was miserable. She lifted dull eyes in which, deep down, a little spark had been kindled. A thin colour came and went on her cheeks. Malden was leaving town next day: it would be pleasant to go to the concert with him.

"Could you spare me to-night for an hour or two. Dunstane?"

Her voice was steady, but the colour was like a pulse in her cheek. Dunstane looked up irritably.

"I wonder you can think of it, Priscilla. 217

Can't you see for yourself?... But it is nothing to you; you would leave me to die just as you left the child ..."

- "Brute!" Malden said under his breath, turning away fiercely. He could not bear to see the shadow quenching the light on Priscilla's face.
- "If you would rather not be alone, Dunstane, Mrs. Gibson is at home . . . I would ask her to sit with you."
- "Mrs. Gibson—faugh!... The room reeks of onions for a week after she has been in it... Besides, my brain is splitting. Imagine her hand... But go! It doesn't matter."

Priscilla went to his side, and laid her fingers on his forehead.

"You should have told me before, dear; I would have massaged it for you."

He flung her hand away, and her wrist struck against the sharp knob of the sofa.

There was a cry, silenced immediately. She covered the wrist with the other hand, but not before Malden had seen the blood starting.

His face was as white as hers. Muttering that she must let him know what she decided, he went out of the room. If he had waited an instant longer he must have thrashed Dunstane then and there.

"The brute! the cowardly brute!"

He walked up and down his studio mad with rage and pain and love . . .

Miss Cardrew and Gertrude had set out together early. The others were to follow. Priscilla knocked at the door where Malden was waiting, a reserved person, commonplace in evening dress. It was difficult to believe that he had ever worn shabby tweed and ramped like a lion in a cage.

A glance at Priscilla showed she was not going: she wore the dress of the workaday world; her face was more tired, more wretched, than he had ever seen it. He drew a chair forward and begged her to sit down. But she would not keep him—he ought to be starting.

"I am not going without you, Mrs. Momerie."

Her eyes travelled round the studio. It was all dismantled, ready for its desertion; the furniture was under sheets—even the angels carrying lilies were draped.

Malden was going to Normandy for a month's sketching. He would have started that night but for the concert. Priscilla remembered that she would not see him for a month, and she sat down wearily, her listless hands on her lap.

Suddenly Malden stooped, and lifted the wounded wrist and looked at the cut Dunstane had made.

He saw more than the scar: he saw the thin wrist, the fleshless arm . . .

The battle he had been fighting all day was over. He was beaten . . . He kissed the purple mark . . .

Priscilla gave a little cry, and snatched her hand away, looking at him with frightened eyes. . . . She could not escape his eyes . . .

"I have been quiet too long!" he said passionately. "I am going to speak now... No,... you must hear me this time... Do you know what you are going to do, Priscilla, Priscilla?"

The name on his lips rippled like a singing brook. Her heart flew to the love in his eyes. She gave a long sigh, and the repression and pain fell away from her face like a mask. There was a hint of youth in her flush.

He took her hand again and bent over her.

"You are going to let me take you away out of this prison. We shall begin life again—boy and girl together—under the blue skies . . ."

The room reeled as she heard him.

"Oh that we two were Maying!
Oh that we two were Maying!"

"I can't go away and leave you to be murdered," he went on furiously... "Isn't it enough that you should sacrifice health and happiness to him?... You shall not give your life too... I would never have spoken if I had thought that he loved you... but he hasn't even manhood enough for that... and you... you don't love him... you never loved him."

"He is my husband . . . I can't listen . . . I can't! Oh let me go! . . . "

"Oh that we two were Maying!"

"You must listen"... He stood before her, preventing her rising. "What does he give you for all you have given him?... You have sacrificed everything... your best years, your talents, yourself... You, who might have written The Book of the Great City. You waste your days on pot-boilers, that life may be easy for a selfish brute... What have you had in return? Cruelty, ingratitude, wounds that cut deeper than this..."

"Ah. don't!"

"But I must!... I have loved you too long to stand dumb and see you die... A woman like you, chained to a living corpse..."

"'Whom God hath joined . . . '" Priscilla gasped through her white lips.

She had no strength to wrestle with this masterful love.

"God joined?" he laughed. "Nay, it was the devil's joining, tying your beautiful years to Momerie's lying humbug."

Malden took quick strides about the room. He was scarcely conscious of what he was say-All these months of pity and devotion had been cutting deep channels in his nature of which he had known nothing. He would have laughed at any one who had told him that a man of his temperament would fall in love with a married woman, and go so far as to tell her he loved her. His love for Priscilla, he had told himself, was a thing apart from passion. It was austere and unselfish, a gentle current that knew nothing of the sweep of ocean tides or the swelling of mountain torrents. He had loved her with a pity that was all pain and hopeless longing. had been no thought of reward or return in his love: he had respected her too much for that. And now the stream had forced its banks, carrying away with it self-restraint, prudence, everything. It was a muddy flood of turbulent passion, on which floated fragments of pity, drifting

planks that had made Love's shrine... He looked at the thin white hands in which she had hidden her thin white face, and he justified himself for the thing that a saner mood would condemn. The anger in his voice fell to pleading.

"Priscilla, you have never been loved yet. Let me teach you to be happy. Let me give you what you have lost . . ."

She looked up then, and her eyes read his face with the wistful questioning of a little child. He had assailed her weakest moment, when the chain was strained to the uttermost. All day she had been dragging at the links which bound her to her life with Dunstane. It was so hopeless, so cramped, so pitiful; and the life beyond the city's misery promised sunshine and freedom and the pagan blessedness her heart craved. To feel her youth once more, the tumult of life in her veins—that would be worth anything. And Malden stood there offering to give her what she had lost.

"I have lost my youth," she sobbed.

Malden's eyes flashed;—he drew himself up, and the strength of his frame was as the strength of ten.

"I can give you that . . . in three months."

- "My beauty!"
- "You are the most beautiful woman in the world," he laughed triumphantly.

Her eyes read him still, seeing the light on his face, the tenderness around his mouth, his strong manhood. And her heart cried out for the joy of life—

"Oh that we two were Maying!
Oh that we two..."

A memory of the morning shook her. The fierce longing Gertrude's song had roused wrestled again with duty and right. The angel that had walked with her veiled his face, and turned away from that unequal combat in which flesh and devil were arrayed against one frail woman heart.

- "I have lost my ideals!" Priscilla moaned.
- "You have given me mine!"
- "My ambition . . ."
- "You shall write your Book of the Great City with me."
 - "I have lost my little baby," she sobbed.
 - " Priscilla . . . "

She started up and stood before him with panting breath, life in her figure. Her eyes saw

a new heaven and a new earth; but the look on her face kept passion at bay.

"I can give you all," he said hoarsely; "the years you have wasted."

She put out her hand; the light died in her eyes.

"Ah, no, no!" she cried. "You can't give me those . . . The years that the locust hath eaten-you can't give them back . . . ''

He took her hands in his; the strong palms around her fluttering fingers quieted her heart too.

"Trust me, Priscilla . . . Love can work miracles . . . We two together . . . ''

> "Oh that we two were Maying! Oh that we two were Maying!"

The music was round her again, crashing through the room, whirling her round in its maze, dulling the pain of those years that the locusts had eaten. Her hands were in his . . . Why should she deny the love for which her heart craved . . . Why should she go back to share Dunstane's cheerless days . . .

"Tell me this," she cried almost fiercely. "Are you one of those men who, so long as 225

they have plenty to eat and drink, and an easy life, are perfectly content?"

- "I don't think so," he said slowly, startled by her manner.
- "And would you think society and the world could not be improved, so long as you had vour own way in life?"
 - "Good gracious, no!"
- "And would you be willing to give up everything, your manhood even, and pretend... pretend... and deceive yourself into thinking you were ill, when all the time... all the time... you were only... selfish... and a coward?"

He stared at her. He could not understand her agitation.

- "I would rather have health in rags than a weak body and all the riches of the world."
- "And you would never talk about anything; your work, your painting, till you had done it?"
- "I fancy that is not one of my weaknesses," he laughed.

She looked searchingly into his face, and he bore her look without flinching. His eyes smiled with a boyish shyness.

"Are you satisfied?" he asked softly. "Will you come?"

She gave a long sigh and drew her hands away.

- "I must think. Give me a few days."
- "I will give you two hours. A train leaves Waterloo at 10.15 for the boat at Southampton. You will come . . . You will let me teach you to love me?"

She lifted her weary eyes to his.

- "Dunstane said he would do that . . . and he couldn't."
- "Dunstane was never a man!" His lips curled.
- "And I think . . . I think . . . I am not a woman . . . Nothing moves me . . . nothing touches me . . . only Dollie . . . And if I gave up my life here . . . for ashes?"

She was like a child appealing to an elder. The trustfulness in her eyes hurt the man.

- "Priscilla," he said gravely; "if you love me . . ."
- "I don't love you," she answered quickly. "My heart is quite cold. But I have always trusted you... and my life is so hard... It can't be right that everything is over for me... I could be so happy... so happy. And you would love me. I think you would love me."
 - "I love you," he interrupted.
 - "And I would be in the sun and breathe

again," she went on passionately. "And I would be free! free!"

"Free as air, Priscilla!"

A sudden fire flamed in her face.

"Right is not best!" she cried, her voice ringing harshly. "And it is never happy. I have done right for these two years... Do I look like a happy woman?"

"You are going to be happy now."

He made a step forward, but she stopped him.

"No...not yet! Let me go...let me think."

His arms dropped.

"Priscilla, I will not even touch you. You are free to decide now... as you shall be free after you have decided." His voice trembled, and the break in it went to Priscilla's heart. "I can't bear the thought of losing you now even for a moment," he cried passionately. "But I can trust you. You will meet me at Waterloo at ten o'clock. You will follow your heart, Priscilla?"

She did not answer, going silently from the studio. Malden stood where she had left him, eyes flashing, pulses beating, heart galloping. He looked round him triumphantly.

The angels carrying lilies were veiled.

CHAPTER XXII.

OH THAT WE TWO WERE MAYING!

PRISCILLA stole quietly into the bedroom—she did not want to see Dunstane.

"I must think . . . I must think . . . "

She threw herself on the little white bed, thinking. It was on this same little bed that she had woven dreams as a girl. Here she had planned her first book. Here she had dreamed of the little baby coming to her. Here Dollie had been born. Here she had lain awake that she might feel her baby in her arms. Her arms were empty now . . .

" Priscilla!"

Dunstane was calling her. She got up wearily.

- "Where have you been all this time? You might just as well have gone to the concert for all the good you have done to me... You are never here when I want you..."
 - "What is it, Dunstane?"
 - "Oh nothing; I can do without it . . .

Your face is enough to prevent any request I might wish to make."

- "If you tell me what it is . . . "
- "And your voice ... it has a nice cheerful sound, hasn't it? You can be gay enough when other people are here ... I don't know what has come to you lately ... You were miserable enough when you had the child ... now she is gone you are ten times worse."
 - "Is that all you wish to say?"
- "I wanted the *Pall Mall* from Mrs. Markham. She was to have brought it . . . But you needn't go . . . And don't stand there like a martyr. You can leave me . . . After all, I am happier without you."

Priscilla trailed her steps down to Mrs. Markham's flat. She could hear the children laughing as they played. It was she who had taught them to be merry—she whose heart was breaking.

She turned the handle and went into the room. Then she paused, her face changing.

"Children dear, what are you doing?"

The question silenced the fun, but their faces were still gleeful.

"We're pl'yin' at buryin' your little byby," Susie piped up. "Dollie's deaded, and we're

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puttin' her into the bury-hole . . . It's a beautiful pl'y."

"It is not a play for little children," said Priscilla, her voice ringing sharply. "It is a play for grown-up people, for mothers... You must wait till you are mothers."

"Learn us another pl'y, Mrs. Momerie."

They tugged at her skirts.

Priscilla gave a great cry:

"It is the only one I know!"

Her voice was on its old dead level when she returned to her husband.

"Mrs. Markham is not in, Dunstane. You will have to wait for your paper."

"I can't wait; I'm too tired. I will go to bed."

She brought the chair and helped him to bed as usual. When he was settled, she stood looking at him, uncertain. Her lips quivered. Would he not help her against herself?

He lifted his head, frowning to see her there still.

"What are you waiting for? I wish you would go and leave me."

"Very well, I will go," she answered despairingly.

She dragged herself into the sitting-room and sat down. She must think.

But she could not think there, with the Madonna, and Tobias and the Angels looking down at her... Her girlish ideals, Dunstane had called them. She went into the kitchen.

There was a strange passiveness on her face now . . . yet in half an hour she would be "a Poor Thing ''-a woman at whom even the 'busman might point derisively. What did it matter? She could scarcely sink lower than she had sunk in these months, when she had served Dunstane with outward devotion and in her heart cherished contempt and all uncharitableness towards him. She looked at the last months. They wore a different complexion even from the months of her first disillusioning. Then she had been strong to pity the man's weakness, and her girlish spirits had carried her safely over the shallows. She had been true to him in all loyalty, though her eyes had been opened to his real character. It had not taken long to find out the man; but she had hidden her discovery and tried to deceive herself as she deceived others. she had been sorry for him, lying helpless all day. Love for her husband was dead, but she could give him such love as she gave Betsy

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Huggins and the other pensioners on her affection.

But even this had been withdrawn after Dollie's death. She had made another discovery: and she could not forgive Dunstane for letting her child die. His helplessness was not due to paralysis, but to its hysterical imitation; he could walk if he would; yet he had sacrificed the baby rather than betray himself. This too Priscilla had hidden, not upbraiding him even in secret. And he had rewarded her by denying the one thing her heart craved. And since the episode of Mrs. Markham's baby he had made no show of love for her. She had almost begun to long for the hollow pretence that before had maddened her.

By hard teaching Priscilla was finding out that it is only Love that can translate life into happiness. And there was no love in her life. Since Dollie's death she had closed her heart to all that still remained to her.

She was in the chair where she had sat holding her little dead baby. But it was not Dollie's weight that she felt on her knee. Malden's head was lying there. He was crying because she had lost Dollie, and her fingers were stroking his hair... It was he that had helped her

through those terrible days. She went with him up the street of Frodsham when he carried Dollie for the last time. She was glad that he had let no one else touch her child... The tears were dropping down her cheeks: slow tears, falling heavily, like the drip, drip from melting glaciers. The tears loosened the ice round her heart. She felt a glow of warmth as she walked with him through those days.

Suddenly she bent forward, covering her shamed face with her hands, and a thrill of humiliation passed over her; for now she knew that she loved Malden. She had loved him ever since she had lost Dollie.

She had not suspected it before. There was no joy in the knowledge; it filled her with the bitterness of another failure.

She tried to get away from the tumult in heart and brain. Her thoughts flew to Dunstane, to hide there from the storm of passion crashing through her. "Go away and leave me... I am happier without you." They were impaled on the sharp voice. Ah, that was true! Dunstane would be happier with some one in whose eyes he did not read discovery of his shams... He had never touched her heart...

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"Follow your heart, Priscilla: it will never lead you wrong."

It was Malden who had said that . . . No, it was Cardie-a good woman, and she knew what it was to love . . .

She was so tired of being lonely . . . so very tired of the weary treadmill and the weary Follow her heart? She knew now that Malden held her heart.

And yet . . . She could not deliberately turn her back on all that she had valued in the old life; her girlish ideals, her loyalty to right, her belief in purity, her allegiance to that "Whom God hath joined . . . ''

A sudden darkness fell upon her thoughts—a sudden horror of great darkness . . . Whom God hath joined? But God had not joined her life with Dunstane's. The Church had not blessed their union; it had only been a legal contract . . .

Her thoughts groped in the darkness, seeing only the flashing will-o'-the-wisp, "Follow your heart, Priscilla." She rose trembling, putting out her hand to the fluttering light. She would follow her heart.

The Queen's Hall was packed. It was the 235

first big concert of the season, and a notable one. The Italian Diva was announced to sing, and a cluster of lesser lights, Madame Lomaz among them. Miss Cardrew, two empty stalls beside her, had no time for regrets. She was all excited happiness.

It was time for Gertrude to sing. The manager came on. "Madame Lomaz was prevented by illness... He begged to introduce the clever young soprano, Miss Gertrude Tennant, of whom they had all heard. It was her first appearance in Queen's Hall. He had great pleasure in introducing so charming a debutante." He disappeared, to reappear leading Gertrude.

Miss Cardrew sat up, stiff and wondering. Was that their little Gertrude?

She stood facing the audience, her eyes bright, her cheeks flushed, happiness, like the shimmer of her white frock, enfolding her. She was not nervous. To-night she made her bid for Malden's love. Surely when he saw her success, when he heard her voice filling the great hall—surely he would see that she was not unworthy . . . surely he would love her at last . . . And she had chosen her song for him. She would tell him in public, loudly, before all those thou-

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sands, what she dare not whisper to him in secret.

The pianist played the opening bars:

"Oh that we two were Maying!"

They saw her grow deadly pale. Her eyes had been caught by Miss Cardrew's white front. She had seen the hollow place in the big audience.

It was to an empty stall that she was to sing . . . And Priscilla was not there either.

She looked at the music and opened her lips
... No sound came ... Her voice had left her.

The pages dropped from her shaking hands.

"Stage fright . . . Poor little thing . . . She is pretty, too . . . "

They clapped.

But with the thought of Priscilla a memory had come to Gertrude. She saw her lying on her bed in mortal agony, bearing her pain, facing death without a cry. She too could be brave; she too would go down into the Valley of Death and make no sound.

She let the pages lie where they had fallen.

Clasping her hands she fixed her eyes on the high lights in the third tier. The pianist looking at her played over the introduction a second

time. She did not fail. Clear and full and true the song came—

"Oh that we two were Maying

Down the stream of some soft spring breeze,
Like children with young flowers playing
In the shade of the whispering trees . . .
Oh that we two were Maying—
Oh that we two were Maying!"

The thrill of excitement in the hall increased. She was only a child, but no one had ever heard that song rendered as she gave it.

"Oh that we two sat dreaming
On the sward of some sheep-trimmed down,
Watching the white mist stealing
Over river and mead and town!
Oh that we two sat dreaming—
Oh that we two sat dreaming!"

The stir subsided; the audience sat breathless. They forgot the florid emotion of the music. The peal of that young voice carried all the yearning, all the longing, all the pain of all the hearts that had ever loved.

A great quiet, threaded by the song, held the vast hall. Here and there a man gripped the handle of his seat, a woman sobbed.

"And our souls at home with God . . . with God . . . And our souls at home with God."

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Her voice did not falter. The people who were near enough saw the tears dropping down her cheeks. She had left the platform and was down the steps before the applause burst . . . It rang and echoed and broke again, thundering as the hall had rarely heard it thunder.

The manager, rubbing his hands, and smiling and bowing, had no opportunity for his little speech.

"Miss Tennant must be excused—an encore was quite impossible, quite—out of the question altogether. They would hope to listen to her many times in Queen's Hall."

They silenced him again. Then they settled down grudgingly to listen to the Diva.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BLANK WALL.

THE sun blazed on Regent's Buildings, making the rooms stuffy and close. The noise of footsteps, the clatter of people going up and down the steps, was clearer than usual—"parched" Priscilla had once called the sounds. The mothers bundled their babies in shawls and gave them to the other babies to carry out of the flats into the streets. They opened their windows, and hung out bed-clothes and pieces of carpet to air. They shook the dust of weeks on to the heads of people passing below. The roar of the Euston Road came louder through the open windows. A brass-band was humorous some-The lark, hanging outside in the where near. sun, shrilled of the skies.

A water-cart went by, and its splash came with a soft monotony as of rain.

Gertrude had left a bunch of big moon-daisies for Momerie as she passed. They signalled the

summer. Dunstane was in a better temper today. He had slept well, and had not missed Priscilla till the morning. Now he missed something more than Priscilla. There was an emptiness in the room he could not account for. His eyes sauntered round . . . Ah! he had it. What had she done with Tobias and the Angels—the Madonna too? He studied the blank wall until she came in.

"Priscilla, what has happened to the pictures?"

She lifted her eyes, blanker than the wall.

"I have taken them down . . . You were right, Dunstane: they belonged to the time of girlish ideals. They are not suitable any more."

Her voice seemed to trail on the ground.

- "It has taken you long enough to come round to my way of thinking... It sounds to me a little high-falutin now,—unnecessary too. I had got used to them. I don't care to look at a bare wall... Suppose you put them up again."
- "I can't; the step-ladder has gone down to the people in the basement. Besides, I could not go up again; it made me dizzy."
- "Well, they can wait till Malden comes in ... I will get him to hang them ... Dizzy, were you? You are looking wretchedly ill ..."

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- "I was up all night with Mrs. Markham's baby."
- "Ah, that accounts for it . . . You will never look well so long as you persist in wasting your time on other people."
- "The baby had convulsions and she came for me. We gave the little thing a hot bath and she is better."

He noticed the despair in her voice, and his glance studied her more carefully than usual. Yes, she looked very ill. He had never seen her so gaunt and wretched and hopeless.

- "Priscilla, I was more or less brutal yesterday. I didn't mean half of what I said. I wish you had gone to the concert."
- "So do I! with all my heart!" she cried passionately.

Her tone made him look again. Her mouth was strained and white, the parted lips dry. Her eyes, a hard glitter in them, moved restlessly.

- "Were you so disappointed?—and you haven't got over it yet . . . Isn't that a little childish?"
- "It is not that . . . I must tell you. I can't go on living here after . . . without . . ."
 - "My good girl, what is the matter?"

She came near to the sofa and stood with

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hands twisted together, looking down at him.

Dunstane's face was lifted cheerfully, his air superior, as one above such weakness as she was showing. He looked prosperous enough, lying there with nothing of the invalid about him. It was Priscilla who was the wreck.

"Last night," she began hoarsely, "I made up my mind . . . to leave you . . . to go . . ."

Dunstane laughed.

"I don't wonder... Yesterday I must have been 'gey ill to live wi'... But you must acknowledge it is not often the east wind affects me."

She pressed her hands together; two patches of red, burning on her cheeks, made her face livid.

"Dunstane, try and understand . . . It is so hard for me to tell you . . . I was going with . . . with . . . "

Her limbs were trembling; she sunk down on her knees and hid her face in the cushions.

"Poor Priscilla! To think you should make such a fuss about a wretched concert... I have been lying here more than a year... do you hear me complain? But you are a true woman..."

His tone lashed her. She sprang to her feet again.

- "Don't!" she cried sharply, her quick breath strangling her. "It is not a light thing to me... I was going with... with Mr. Malden."
- "And why didn't you go?" he asked lightly. It amused him to see Priscilla, "the Equable," as he called her, in a passion about nothing.
- "I was going," she said miserably. "There seemed nothing to stay for . . . I didn't do it hastily . . . I thought about it . . . And I would have gone . . . only . . . "
 - "Only what?"
- "Mrs. Markham came for me...and the baby... made me think...you had loved...
 Dollie...and you would be lonely."
- "So you spent the evening with Mrs. Markham's baby. Don't you think that seems a little illogical, Priscilla? As far as my loneliness was concerned, you might just as well have been at the concert with Malden."

Priscilla clenched her hands as they hung at her side; an appealing anguish chased the passion from her face.

"Oh, why will you make me say it, Dunstane? Can't you understand?... I was going away with... with him... to Normandy..."

A BLANK WALL.

The clatter of the words in her throat was like the sounds on the stairs outside... She saw a sudden sharp rigidness in Dunstane's figure. He stiffened from head to heel. His eyes were cruel... She covered her face, and sunk down again beside the sofa... But the keen blade of his glance cut away even the poor protection of her shame. It slashed about her bent head... It was harder than words or blows.

She lifted her face to meet it . . . the cold steel made her shrink back cowering.

- "Dunstane! for Dollie's sake . . . " She put out her hand.
- "I am thinking of Dollie," he said icily. "This explains your neglect of the child."

A smile shuddered across her lips.

- "You are wrong . . . My little baby . . ."
- "There, Priscilla! don't go into that story... I have had enough for to-day... I must ask you to leave me."

She lifted herself slowly to her feet and looked at him with strained eyes. The smile had withered her lips.

- "I know I have done wrong . . . If you will forgive me . . . Let me stay . . ."
- "It is no question of forgiveness," he said coldly. "Let you stay?... I have no option...

I am helpless in my misfortune . . . I must depend on some one. My wife seems to be the proper person . . . ''

"I will never see Malden again!" she cried passionately.

"There you are absurd... selfish too. I can't afford to break with Malden. I depend on him for society. I have a duty to the men who attend his At Homes. I don't blame Malden. The fault was not his. You are not attractive enough for any man to lose his head about you. No doubt he pitied you, and when your feelings carried you away... No, Malden is not to blame—I am convinced of that."

"It was my fault," said Priscilla. "It was all my fault."

She stood watching Dunstane, seeing the rigidness pass from his figure, the cheerfulness return to his face, the airy content perch once more on his forehead. A quick passion leaped through her; fire blazed in her eyes. Her thoughts held a whip knotted with scorpions. She longed to twist it round that lying body, to tell him that she despised him; that she knew the paralysis which held him was not of limb, but of will and mind and heart, and all that

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makes a man . . . He saw the flame in her eye; perhaps he read her thoughts.

"No more hysterics, Priscilla," he said airily.
"I will trouble you to bring me my work.
That at least is left to me. My salvation lies in work."

She threw her whip from her, choking back a sound that was neither sob nor laugh. He was so pitiful she could not even despise him . . .

She was outside the door when he called her back.

"You might ask Malden to come in and put those pictures up . . ."

The colour dashed into her cheeks; she stared at him.

- "Dunstane! . . ."
- "Why not?" he sneered. "You surely don't expect me to lie here looking at a blank wall because you have made a fool of yourself!"

She clenched her hands, the nails biting into the flesh. It was part of her punishment; she would bear it meekly.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION.

PRISCILLA'S face was ghastly, but she held her head high and walked with firm steps to Malden's door. He answered her knock himself, and she went into the studio, not speaking. It was their first meeting after the night's madness. Malden's cheeks were hollow. There was no love in his eyes.

They looked at each other in silence. Her lips trembled, the pride passed from her face. She put out her hand and caught at a chair to steady herself.

He drew another forward.

- "Sit down," he said, but his voice was stiff and reserved. There was an aloofness even in his glance.
- "I have come to tell," she said in a low voice, "to tell you . . ."
 - "Yes?"
 - "That I was wrong . . . last night."

There was a sudden loosening of the muscles

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round his mouth. It was as if a cord had snapped, freeing them.

- "The fault was mine," he said coldly; "I measured my trust in you by my love for you."
- "You are angry with me," she caught her breath.
- "Why didn't you come?...after promising..."
- "I forgot," she whispered; "I had promised Dunstane first."
- "You hurt me cruelly, Priscilla; no man likes to be fooled."

She looked up fearlessly; her voice rang.

- "And don't you think we should both have been fooled if I had gone?"
- "That depends . . ." he said coldly. "You would not have given up much happiness . . ."
- "Would there have been any happiness to find?" she asked. "Imagine our life afterwards... two people who had nothing high or beautiful in their love... only the lowest, and the shame and the despair. Don't you think it would be worse than anything I suffer now? Wouldn't we loathe each other? and the sin and the passion? The only bond between us, shame!"

He walked up and down the room before he answered, clearing his throat.

- "I had thought of all that yesterday. I was willing to risk it. I should have found compensation in love."
- "It is not love," she whispered, "it is not love that is blind and selfish . . ."
- "It is easy for you to talk," he said bitterly. "You don't know what love is . . . If you had loved me you would not have come now . . . to talk platitudes."

Her eyes blazed up at the rough tones. She looked steadily at him.

"Last night," she said slowly, "I said what was not true. I told you I did not love you. It was false. I do love you... I have never loved any one but you..."

He sprang towards her, an eager question in his eyes, but his face fell before her blank irresponsiveness.

- "Why do you tell me this?" he asked fiercely.
 "To mock me?"
- "Because I want you to help me against myself."

He laughed very bitterly.

- "We have gone too far to go back . . . It is impossible to forget."
- "I don't want to forget. I want you to help me to make my life better," she said.

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He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

- "You are a woman; you don't understand a man's nature. Do you suppose that after this we can go on living as though we were nothing to each other?"
 - "We have done it all these months."
- "Do you suppose we could keep up the farce? Your husband?"
- "Dunstane knows; I have told him . . ." she interrupted.

Malden started, gazing at her with wide eyes. For the first time he noticed the havoc made by the night in her appearance.

A feeling of great pity for her swept over him. He could imagine how a man like Dunstane would receive her confession; how his weakness, his very lack of manhood, would make him jealous of any tampering with his rights, his property. It was that type of man that made the most brutal and exacting plaintiff in divorce cases . . . And Priscilla had had to bear the coarse abuse such men heap upon erring wives.

- "You have told him?" he said pitifully.
- "Yes. I wanted to begin again, and I was obliged to tell Dunstane."
 - "And what did he say?"

"He sent me to ask you to come and hang some pictures for him." She laughed.

Malden stared at her.

- "Are you serious?"
- "Yes," said Priscilla, flushing deeply.
- "And you are going to stay with a weak fool like that?"
- "Yes...I can try to win back the months I have wasted."
- "What do you mean? You can't want to win back his love?"
 - "No, but I can atone for my failure."

Malden looked at her, and pity mastered his anger. He understood the life she had been living. Every moment of it was traced upon her. It was not Dollie's death only that had cut those lines in her young face . . .

He put out his hand to her, passion giving way to tenderness.

"Priscilla, right is not always best. If I leave you here you will die."

She shook her head sadly. The tears had started to her eyes at the change in his voice.

"Right may not be happiest, but it is best," she answered steadily. "I have wasted these months and been selfish. I see where I failed, and I am not going to add a bigger failure to my life."

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Malden walked to the window and stood looking out in silence. Then he turned to her, his face set, a new reverence in his glance—the new reverence that was the old.

"You wish me to leave you?" he asked gently. "You wish me to leave you to die?"

She lifted her white face, but he could not meet the misery of her eyes.

"I shall not die—pain never kills," she smiled bravely. "I wish you to go to Normandy... just the same as you had intended... And when you can help me to be true to myself and... and to Dunstane... you will come back..."

"If you loved me you could not ask such a thing," he said with quick impatience. "You forget that I love you."

"It is because I love you that I can say it," she answered; "and because you love me you will do it."

Before he could speak again she had left him.

* * * * *

"My salvation lies in work; that at least is left me."

For weeks the words hummed in Priscilla's ears, dulling the cry of her heart, the wail of her broken spirit.

Malden had gone away. The madness of the night was over for both. Priscilla had lifted up her life again to carry it in humility and penitence until death should take it from her weary arms. She had followed her heart, and it had led her to Mrs. Markham's help. Once more the little child had saved her.

She understood now the perils of inaction. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God" led her softly where grief called to her for pity and healing. There were others around her more wretched than herself, and when her heart cried out in its loneliness she went away from the house into the slums, and looked on the starving children and on the misery of the people, and listened to the moan of the human sea, and came back strong to endure. She was gentler with Dunstane, more patient with his weakness because of her own.

The scene between Dunstane and herself had ended by her claiming her freedom. Three rooms might be large enough for joy; sorrow needed more space. Priscilla had to go into the highways to find room for her aching heart; and the tide of the misery she saw outside bore her over the sharp rocks of her desolation and remorse.

Down in the slums, with the awful roar of the

sea in her ears, her thoughts went back to The Book of the Great City. Malden had said she should write it with him. She told herself now she would write it without him. She would write it in atonement of her fall. She would gather some good from the past. She would retrieve the wasted years. In love lay salvation and deliverance from the self that had betraved Once more her heart opened to the poor people around her. It did not matter that the gifts she could give were only pity and gentleness and sympathy. She was a woman who had failed-sinned in thought if not in fact; she had loved, and she had tasted death. things which made the life of the Buildings, failure and sin and hopelessness and death, she Her hands were tender because could touch. they had been torn.

How could she spare the time from this work to write The Book of the Great City? She had already too much writing to do... She still trod the wheel, beating out the stories by which they lived. It was hard enough to make thirty shillings a week writing constantly; she could not afford to break into this necessary work...

But the night was hers—the nights she had given up to her love for Dollie. She could give

them up now to her love for the people. She would write the book that should make the wail of the city heard in the homes of the rich.

It was summer-time, and the light came soon. She might snatch three hours before the work of the day.

After that Priscilla began to write at three o'clock. And as the weeks went on Miss Cardrew and Gertrude became anxious about her. She was thinner than ever, with weary eyes that had looked their last on youth.

Dunstane explained her appearance to his own satisfaction; smiling cheerfully as he listened to the experiences of Mrs. Gibson on women who had wasted, and to stories of Mrs. Markham's sister, who had a strong resemblance to Priscilla, and had died, when she was forty, of a broken heart... His cheerfulness had come back since the day of Priscilla's humiliation. It was as if her lapse condoned his faults.

If Priscilla died of a broken heart—and that was all fudge!—he would not be to blame. What husband would have looked so lightly on her fault as he had done?... He had scarcely spoken to her at the time, and the subject had not been mentioned again. He felt that he had acted magnanimously, and Priscilla ought to be

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grateful to him. It certainly looked as if she felt some gratitude; she had been subdued in her manner lately, and these gossiping women spoke of consumption! . . .

It was true that she was subdued and gentle. Her lapse had taught her mercy and pity. She could not judge Dunstane harshly any more. If he did not live up to his New Religion, did she live any nearer to her ideal? If he lay battening on his selfishness, had there not been greater selfishness in her own conduct? If he deceived himself into a sham invalidism, did she not deceive her friends by a pretence of faithfulness to him? She lashed herself with the whip she had prepared for him, and grew pitiful and tolerant towards his weakness.

Tobias and the Angels, and the Madonna, were still in the cupboard waiting for Malden to come back and hang them up. But the end of August came and Malden was still in Normandy. And one day a box arrived at Regent's Buildings addressed to Mrs. Momerie. It contained "A Nineteenth-century Madonna."

Priscilla carried it away to the bedroom to hang over it unseen. Malden had given her back Dollie . . . She could look at her face again.

Dunstane gazed at the picture with eager eyes.

He would not let her take it away. It must be where he could see it ... over the mantel-piece ... He was tired of that blank wall ... Why should she have it in the bedroom? ... But there ... she had never loved the child as he had ...

Priscilla made no answer. Her face was very grey when she put up the picture. Her fingers trembled; but to-day the dizziness was in her heart . . .

The painting loosened Dunstane's tongue. He would be able to get on with his work now. The memory of the child would inspire him . . . He talked eloquently of the little child . . . the great power of life . . . the strongest influence in the world . . . It was a mistake to have given the child no place in his New Religion . . . The infant had been the keystone of all religions . . . from the Egyptian Mythology. Yes, it was a mistake, but he could still make it right . . . He would rearrange his notes, developing the idea . . . It was worth doing . . . The place of the child on the altars of earth.

Priscilla sat, grey and silent, while he talked. But when Miss Cardrew came in and he began again, she slipped away, the ashes on her face, her eyes remembering.

CHAPTER XXV.

"MOMERIE, GROCER AND TEA-DEALER."

NOVEMBER had come, slight and worn, grey with mist and fog. The year was thinning towards its close, sharpening down to that point that would pierce the earth when the New Year looked at the post Time had set up to mark his track. The city shivered in its worn garments, shrinking within itself as it felt the fingers of cold and fog. Regent's Buildings were cheerless and gloomy. The red bricks had lost the glow of youth during these three years.

Priscilla had finished The Book of the Great City. Messrs. Snoad & Follows had the manuscript under consideration. She had put her heart into it, giving voice to all the pity and pathos of the life around her.

She had put her life into it. The hours she had spent in writing it had been hours snatched from sleep—snatched also from sleep's twin brother, Death.

The work had been too much. The heat of

the summer, the anguish with which she had written, the pinch of want, the sordidness of the life she lived, had set their mark upon her. Her strength had lasted while the work lasted; now it was almost spent.

The daily stories had become an insufferable burden; they did not bring in thirty shillings a week now. She kept the household together with difficulty . . . only Dunstane did not notice that their comforts were fewer than of old. She denied herself bare necessaries, but a feverish excitement kept her up. She must see her book in print—that was still to live for.

One day she tottered up to Miss Cardrew's flat.

The little spinster was at her desk, in an ancient purple gown trimmed with velvet vandykes. Priscilla knew the costume; it was dedicated to tragedy.

Miss Cardrew ran forward to meet her, flourishing a cheque; her face broken up between tears and laughter.

"I was just coming down to tell you, my dear," she cried joyfully. "It has come at last! My book has sold beyond my most pleasurable dreams. Priscilla, my dear, I shall be able to live in the country... and have a little

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shop . . . and you will come and stay with me, and get strong again."

Priscilla stooped and kissed the happy old face. Then she slipped down on her knees, and clung to Miss Cardrew and broke into passionate weeping:

"Oh, Cardie dear! If I could only see the country again, the fields and the skies! If I could only get away from the sound of the sea... I can't bear it any more. And the sight of drowning men and women drifting past... always... always... And the sad faces of the children... And I can do nothing... I think my heart is breaking... If I could only go to Frodsham and lay my head on Dollie's grave... and look up at the skies..."

Miss Cardrew kneeled on the floor and drew her into her arms.

"My dear, my dear! You are ill, Priscilla, and worn out. O my poor darling, I never saw you cry before!... Where is your brave heart?... Hush! hush! I can't bear to hear you... You shall go away to the country... And Mrs. Gibson will take charge of your dear husband... I thought of it as soon as the cheque came..."

"If I could get away from the sea...the

moaning... the voice of the people that perish... If I could go to Frodsham... Cardie, do you remember the lane where the violets grew?... And that big field with the cowslips?... And the hedge full of birds' nests?... Oh, if I could see them again... If I could only see them again!..."

She broke off crying, and Miss Cardrew cried with her.

"If I could go to Frodsham," Priscilla went on, "I would never come back again . . . never . . . never . . . I would keep a little shop like Dunstane's mother, and sell soap and soda, and things to make life clean . . . and I would give sweeties to the children, and put sand in the sugar . . ."

She laughed hysterically.

"My dear, my dear, don't! You break my heart! You can't mean it . . . You would not choose to bury yourself in a grocer's shop . . . your youth . . . your talents . . . It is so different with me . . . I am old . . . "

"My youth! My talents!" Priscilla echoed, a terrible shrillness in her laugh. "Cardie dear, my talents are not worth ten shillings a week . . . And my youth . . . look . . ."

She bared her arm and showed the skin with-

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ered over the sharp bones. There was a little white scar on her wrist: that was where Malden had kissed her. Miss Cardrew made haste to draw the sleeve down again.

- "Priscilla! Priscilla! you break my heart, my dear . . ."
- "There are so many broken hearts in London," said Priscilla, "one more doesn't seem to matter."
- "My dear Priscilla, if you would really like to go... I had thought of it once, it is such a pretty little shop, cool and clean, not like the Buildings... and the name is over the door still: 'Momerie, Grocer and Tea-Dealer'..."

Miss Cardrew stopped and looked her eager question.

- "What do you say?" Priscilla asked wearily. Her passion was over; her white face on Miss Cardrew's knee bore a ghastly resemblance to Dollie's.
- "The little shop, my dear . . . I can purchase the good-will . . . I have enough money . . . I was going to do it for . . . for an acquaintance . . . a friend . . . And there is no need . . . if you will take it instead . . . You and your dear husband could live there very happily . . . The name is over the door—Momerie . . . "

The little spinster choked, and coughed to hide it . . .

"These November fogs, my dear . . . "

She sets her lips sternly. Priscilla should not guess what it cost her to give up her dream of a cottage in the country for the end of her days...

She was doing it for Priscilla's sake...

"And you will let me come and spend a Sunday with you occasionally . . . very occasionally, my dear," she faltered.

Priscilla's eyes were closed. Miss Cardrew's heart dropped as she caught that ghastly resemblance to Dollie.

"Give up our life here . . . and my work . . . and go to Frodsham to keep shop? . . . It is difficult to believe you are sane, Miss Car-

drew!''

"But indeed, Mr. Momerie, I have thought very rationally about it... The scheme has various advantages... You can't continue to reside here... Our dear Priscilla is very, very ill... Unless she gets away into the country I tremble for her... She has come to the end of her strength... She is not able to write any more... What is to become of you..."

"When my great work is published," said

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Dunstane cheerfully, "Priscilla will not need to write any more."

"Yes; oh, that is quite correct ... It is certain to achieve a very great success ... But till you finish it ... Time is of the greatest importance ... At Frodsham Priscilla would gain health and strength ... She would manage the little shop ... it would not make so great a demand upon her as literature ... You could continue your great work ... And you could get out into the air ... you would not be a prisoner as you are now ... though your patience is an example to us all ... and we shall all be so much poorer without your beautiful philosophy to help us ... Indeed, Mr. Momerie, there are advantages, and for Priscilla's sake ..."

"Why doesn't Priscilla come and ask the favour for herself?"

"I have persuaded her to lie down. I fear she is very ill. I never saw her cry before... Our dear Priscilla, so good, so cheerful, so kind, always unselfish..."

"It is the dull weather . . . hysterical, probably . . ."

"It is more than that. She is wasted to a shadow. I have seen it for some time . . ."

- "It is impossible for me to go to Frodsham," he said sharply—"any other place . . ."
- "She has set her heart on Frodsham... Dollie is there, and she wants to go back to the scene of her happy girlhood!"
- "It is all false sentiment . . . She can go away for change . . . to the sea for a week . . . "
- "That will not save her . . . She is dying . . . our dear Priscilla . . . Nothing but Frodsham can save her . . ."

Miss Cardrew's white front bobbed despairingly. She gave Dunstane a look eloquent of her disappointment and grief, and she went away leaving him to the suggestion.

Go back to Frodsham to be a grocer like his father—he, a 'Varsity man and the author of the New Religion! Back to Frodsham among the rustics—away from that little group of disciples that made life worth living! Sacrifice his future to tallow candles—he who held a torch that would light the world! Miss Cardrew must be crazy!

His laugh was silenced by a knock and the opening of the door. Gertrude looked in; her face was graver, sadder than it had been, but her eyes were more steadfast and kind. Her hands were full of parcels, toys for the Christmas tree

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she was making ready for the children of the Buildings.

- "I wanted Priscilla," she said, looking round for her.
- "Priscilla and Miss Cardrew are out of their minds," said Dunstane.
 - "Priscilla! . . ." Gertrude stopped . . .
- "How absurd you are!" she laughed relieved.
- "What has happened?"
- "Sit down and let me tell you, Miss Tennant... You are a practical person... not sentimental like Miss Cardrew or impulsive like my wife... What do you think those women have planned together?... They actually want me—me!—to go and live in the country and keep a grocer's shop!"

He looked at her. There was no dismay on her face.

- "Well?" she said quietly.
- "Well? Did you ever hear anything so absurd?"
- "I think it is a very sensible idea, Mr. Momerie."

He raised himself on his elbow and looked at her.

- "Do you know what it means?"
- "I think I do . . . it means less drudgery for

Priscilla, less struggle to live; more fresh air, and sun, and escape from the life that is killing her . . ."

- "Priscilla, Priscilla," he said fretfully. "It is always Priscilla . . . I must sacrifice my brilliant future to Priscilla, I suppose . . ."
- "Your brilliant future?" said Gertrude, lifting her brows. "What is that?"
- "It is impossible you have forgotten, Miss Tennant," he said with dignity. "I allude to my great work, the New Religion . . ."
- "I have ceased to believe in your great work," she said quietly. "A religion without love only makes a helpless, selfish, impotent life... And that is what your religion has brought you to..."
 - "I don't understand you," he gasped.
- "It is time some one made you understand," she said drily . . . "And for Priscilla's sake you shall hear the truth from me."
- "Priscilla again," he said bitterly. "Not content with her own evil thoughts, she must needs give them to you."
- "Priscilla is a hundred times too good for a mean nature like yours," she said hotly. "We should all have found you out long ago if she had not made us believe there was something in

a man to whom she could give such love and faithfulness... It is she who has screened you all these months... Do you think you could have deceived us all if she had not shielded you?"

"Go on," he sneered; "I lie here helpless... but go on ..."

"Yes, I will go on," said Gertrude furiously. "You are a fraud, a humbug! You lie there all day content to see her killing herself:—you never want anything . . . it is Priscilla who starves . . . You talk of your New Religion—it is all gas . . . Has it ever made you lift a straw to lighten her burden? Has it ever given her a grateful word for the life she has wasted on you? A beautiful girl like Priscilla! And she has drudged and slaved, and killed herself for a man whose heart is not big enough for a mouse . . ."

He smiled forgivingly.

"You are under my roof, Miss Tennant; I will try to remember that . . ."

"I found you out the day they went to Frodsham with Dollie . . . I saw then what you were . . . You hadn't a thought for the poor brokenhearted mother . . . The loss was all yours. As if you had given Dollie one thousandth part of the love Priscilla gave . . . And after

that you kept her here, and robbed her of every bit of relief she might have had in her life... And now you would keep her here and kill her, sooner than confess yourself the failure you are!"

- "Your opinion against the world, Miss Tennant?" he sneered.
- "It is not mine alone . . . Mr. Malden knows . . . he found you out first . . . And I would tell Miss Cardrew, only for Priscilla's sake . . . "
- "This is the girl who has brought me flowers and sung to me . . ."
- "You only got them, because in that way they reached Priscilla . . . You have my real opinion of you now, Mr. Momerie . . . You would have had it before if it had not been that I would not hurt Priscilla . . ."
 - "When you have quite done . . ."
- "I have done now . . . And I strongly advise you to go into the country and keep shop and support your wife, as any other man would have done long ago in your place. It will give you a better future than any you will ever win from your New Religion."

Gertrude's face was hard in its indignation.

"I forgive you," he called after her as she went out. He lay there with an amused smile

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on his face. He was pleased with himself. It was delightfully humorous that Priscilla, who had failed, should pose as perfection, while he should be shown up in the worst colours. A less magnanimous man would have cleared himself at Priscilla's expense. He had borne that girl's insults with dignity and in silence. Yes, he was pleased with himself.

So they thought Priscilla had sacrificed herself for him? How absurd! She had not chosen to gratify him even in trifles. That request of his for the pictures now? He had had to miss Tobias and the Angels, and stare at the blank wall for months. He had liked Tobias and the Angels; it was more suggestive than Malden's picture which had replaced it. The Angels had led him to success; Priscilla and Dollie led nowhere but to Frodsham.

That suggestion of Frodsham was ridiculous . . . Miss Cardrew's crazy sentiment. He stared at the picture . . . What a terrible hunger in Priscilla's eyes—and how ill she looked! Was it true that this life was killing her? Could she only be saved by going back to Frodsham?

To Frodsham? It was impossible! Imagine him selling candles, and cheese and bacon! But he had forgotten. He would lie on the sofa

while Priscilla sold them. Still it was almost the same thing. Going back to Frodsham would mean a confession of failure.

Staying here was not so pleasant either. Malden and Priscilla and that girl pitted against him meant failure in another sense... If it had been any other place but Frodsham... After all, would Frodsham be worse than life here with those three against him?

If it had been anything but the old place, the old shop. Why must Priscilla set her heart on Frodsham of all the dull little towns in Great Britain? "Nothing but Frodsham could save her now." Was it true? Must he sacrifice his future to Priscilla?

Nonsense!—it could not be dreamed of. To humiliate himself, to give up all that he had achieved, hoped for . . . he could not do it . . . Not even to save Priscilla. The perspiration grew on his forehead . . . He moved impatiently, upsetting the piled sheets he had been paging for the New Religion when Miss Cardrew came in. The blank pages fell around him in a shower; they covered him; they strewed the floor. They represented the New Religion—and he could not move to gather them up.

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He felt his helplessness again as on that day when Dollie had died and he had not moved to save her... His little Dollie, his nice little thing... He could imagine her lying on the sofa beside him, her tiny grasp on his finger holding him; where was she leading him?

He turned his face to the wall. He had turned in that way when she had died, only to-day her cold little hand was tight around his finger. She cried to him that he would let her mother die as he had let her die . . . A spasm of terror shook him. He could not get away from the little dead child. Dollie's hand clutched his finger.

Some hours he lay there—while the devil and the angels fought for the soul of Dunstane Momerie...

When Priscilla came in he looked up cheerfully.

"That is a capital scheme of Miss Cardrew's. We will go back to Frodsham. Lucky for us the lease of the shop has expired just now... And the name is still over the door. It will be a good experience for me to go back to the simple life of my boyhood... And you will be in the shop again, only now there will be no counter between us..."

"I think the counter has always been between us," said Priscilla, very wearily.

But he took no notice of the remark . . .

She had to listen to a pastoral poem on the Pleasures of the Past.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE YEARS THAT THE LOCUST HATH EATEN.

THERE was only the publishers' letter to wait for now. Priscilla would sell the copyright of The Book of the Great City. The sum down would help them to take the little shop at Frodsham, then she and Dunstane would begin life again—grocer and tea-dealer; and Miss Cardrew would live with them and have a share in the business. Priscilla had decided that she would not allow Cardie to spend all her savings upon them. But she knew her story was good . . . There would be no difficulty in getting that sum down . . . If the letter would only come! There was so little time; her life was slipping from her, the clutching fingers had no strength to hold it.

Every day she grew weaker: she would have gone to see Messrs. Snoad & Follows; but she had not strength enough even for so little.

At last she wrote to them, begging to know their decision... By the afternoon's post she received a packet. The neat superiority of that

parcel struck terror to her: it was complacency covering defeat . . . She opened it with sinking heart. Inside there was a sheet of paper:

"To Mrs. Momerie, 30 Regent's Buildings, Euston Road. With Messrs. Snoad & Follows' Compliments."

That was all . . . The Book of the Great City returned with the publishers' compliments.

"Compliments!" she laughed bitterly.

They sealed her doom with compliments. It was death's little irony... She would keep those compliments to help her through the Valley of Death. She folded the paper and put it carefully aside, then sat down holding the manuscript on her knees. She could not go into the sitting-room to Dunstane... The bitterness of death was upon her. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes! her book had come back to her...

This was the end, then—the end of that hope that had lent her crutches through these weary months... There was nothing left to hope for now. She would never write again... And she would never see the green fields at Frodsham... She would have to stay and die in the Buildings, where she had fought that hard fight with life and been beaten, where she had lived those wasted years. Even her last wish the locusts had eaten.

How clearly the years stood out, ridged against the setting sun; and failure was red on them all. The worthless success of her first book; her marriage that had been no marriage; her little baby...her life in the Buildings. She had meant to make the place brighter and better for every one. What had she done?

She had taught the children to play at burying Dollie.

She had spoiled Gertrude's life, coming between her and the man she loved. She had banished Malden from his home.

She had tried to silence the voice of the great sea moaning round her, and she had only added other voices to swell the moaning.

She thought of the poor people she had loved and would have helped . . . Her empty hands had brought them nothing.

She thought of her father . . . It was she who had driven him from the Rectory. Yet he had been right in opposing her marriage

She thought of Dunstane; she had given him nothing but what he could have bought... Her unfaithfulness. She had not even been true to herself. The locusts had eaten everything.

And now, at twenty-four, there was nothing

left to live for... She was dying. And her Book of the Great City, into which she had written her heart, had been thrown back to her... with compliments!

She sat staring at it with bleached face and stricken eyes... It was like a live thing... It had hands pushing her down into the ground, heaping failure upon her... It had feet that danced upon her grave... It had eyes that mocked her futile ambition... She put out her hands, trying to push the book from her. She was too weak to move it. She covered her eyes with a bitter cry...

"O God! the years that the locust hath eaten! the years that the locust hath eaten!"...

And like an echo of the words came the steady tapping on a coffin-lid in the basement.

Her thoughts quieted. She had sat in that room holding her living baby, and love had been near her. There she had held her little dead baby; and love had been very close. There she had fought her great battle, and love had conquered. And now she held another dead child—another Dolores. Death had conquered love! Death and the locusts. The tears were scorched in her eyes, burnt up by those parched years that the locusts had eaten.

And now it was nearly over . . . She looked at her hands . . . They were skeletons . . . One wrist had a little scar . . .

"If I could have seen him again," she whispered. She rose unsteadily, slipping the book on to the chair. Was this death that she felt?

"It will soon be over, then. Thank God! Thank God!" Her eyes were on the title of the manuscript: "The Book of the Great City..." No, that was wrong: it should have been something else... There was another title... There was another title... "The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God"... no, not that! not that! If she could only remember... Ah yes! she knew it... She found a pen, and scored through the title, her fingers shaking. Her limbs were shaking too; she could not stand. She slipped down on her knees, and wrote over the title that she had crossed out:

"The Years that the Locusts have Eaten."

She knelt there, looking at it with wistful eyes.

"My little child . . . won from the night . . . and it died when it saw the day . . . But I shall have Dollie again . . . I shall have my little Dollie again . . ."

She took up the pen, holding it uncertainly

while she thought. Then she guided her unsteady fingers for other words. When she had finished she read aloud what she had written:

- "I will restore unto them the years that the locust hath eaten."
- "Yes, that is right, that makes it right," she smiled. "I can say Dollie's prayer over that: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God.'"

She rose up trembling.

"If I could get out into the air I should not be so faint. The top of a 'bus... I should like the wind to bite my face..."

She put on some wraps, and crawled into the sitting-room.

- "I am going out a little, Dunstane. Have you everything you want?"
- "Yes; everything. Don't hurry back, Priscilla; Miss Cardrew is coming in to help me with the Introduction."
- "I know . . . You will not miss me, then . . . I shall take a red 'bus, I think, as far as Kensington Church."

He looked kindly at her. "Stay out as long as you can; the drive will do you good."

"Yes, good-bye, Dunstane." She turned into the room and kissed him, thinking that he had

been more thoughtful of late. He had seemed to care for her a little; and she had not found it so difficult to please him.

Mrs. Gibson was bustling about on the landing, shaking mats. The door of Malden's flat stood open.

"Mr. Malden 'ave telegraphed to say as 'e'll be 'ome to-day or to-morrow, Mrs. Momerie."

"I am glad."

Priscilla smiled as she looked through the doorway. She could catch a glimpse of the procession of angels carrying lilies.

As she went through the big doors the postman was coming in, whistling. She wondered how he could be glad, carrying despair and death and sorrow . . . It was only the boy with telegrams that ought to whistle . . . There was no red 'bus in sight, but a green one was driving along the Euston Road. Yes, that would do. It went along the Marylebone Road. She would be able to see the bare trees in the Park as they went past. She liked the trees bare—a fine veil against the fine veil of the sky. She stopped the 'bus, holding on tightly as she climbed It made her think of the stepthe steps. ladder in the Buildings. So she had climbed when she hung up her "Girlish Ideals."

she had mounted when she took them down again . . .

The keen air flogged her laggard blood, her pulses. She could feel her heart beating . . . It was nice to be "up high" once more . . . And what a smart little driver! Only the poor horses dragged wearily . . . They were tired too . . . The little coachman must get another team . . . She looked about her, her eyes brightening. A wan colour had grown in her cheeks. blood was swingeing through her veins . . . Was she the same Priscilla who had thanked God for death an hour ago? She did not feel like dving now . . . Hope was coming back . . . Everything was not at end because one publisher had refused her book. She would try another firm. book must succeed; it was alive . . . Courage, Priscilla! A merry heart goes all the way! die at twenty-four! Nonsense! A healthy young woman . . . killed in three years! Where was her vitality? What was the good of her splendid physique? Nonsense! She was alive, like her book; she would live to succeed yet! . . . She was stronger already . . . all but the strange giddiness . . . she ought not to have got on the top of the 'bus . . . she would have been better inside.

"I must go down," she said, smiling. "I was not meant for the Heights."

"It is a business letter, Mr. Momerie; and it is marked 'Immediate' . . . I think it might be advisable to open it."

Miss Cardrew pushed up her spectacles, and gazed enquiringly at Dunstane as she handed him the letter.

"Priscilla said she would not be gone long, but I told her not to hurry back... I may as well see what it is."

The letter was from Mr. Snoad. He had read with great interest Mrs. Momerie's strong and powerful story, and he congratulated her. It was a long time since he had read anything so They would be glad to offer her terms a sum down, and a royalty. He would bring out the book at once, for the spring sales . . . But the title was not attractive. Could she not think of a better one? And the end of the story was so very sad . . . Could she not see her way to remodelling the last chapter? He had forwarded the manuscript by parcel post, and would be glad if she would make the alterations he suggested and return it without delay.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHERE IS PRISCILLA?

It was after ten o'clock when Malden arrived, tired from long travel. But there was more than weariness in his face. He was older and sterner and graver;—a man who had fought a fight in which youth had been conquered. But if he had lost his youth he had gained strength, and the expression of careless good-humour had given place to earnestness. His eyes brightened as he climbed the steps... After all, it was good to be at home again.

The lamps were lighted in his flat. Supper was laid. There was a fire. The flames flickered on the wall, showing the procession of angels carrying lilies. He laid down his traps and glanced round him.

"Yes, it is good to be at home again, and to know that I have conquered the old madness. These six months I have fought with beasts at Ephesus... I can help poor Momerie in his fight—and I can help her to see his good points..."

A step was in the hall; and Mrs. Gibson bustled in . . .

- "I thort as 'ow I 'eard you come, and I'm sure I'm more nor glad to see you, Mr. Malden. Dear, dear! to think as you're just in time to 'elp poor Mr. Momerie in his trouble."
 - "What is wrong with him?" said Malden.
- "It's Mrs. Momerie . . . she hain't been 'ome all day, and 'e's that upset . . . I'm sure it's 'eart-breakin' to see 'im takin' on . . . and my Jimmy has cried hisself to sleep . . . ''
- "What has happened?" Malden asked sharply.
- "Well, there's no tellin'. Some says one thing; some another... She said as 'ow she'd take the 'bus to Kensington 'igh Street. But we all knows as 'ow it goes on to 'Ammersmith... and there's the river, and the bridge... and she's been that low lately... and looked orful. As I said to Jimmy..."

Malden did not wait for the end of the sentence. He was in Dunstane's room before Mrs. Gibson saw that she had lost her listener.

The room was full of people, men and women from the Buildings who had come to offer them-

selves . . . if they could do anything. stane's audience was larger than usual, but his eloquence had deserted him. Malden's heart filled with pity when he saw his haggard face, and the eyes stricken with remorse and a terrible dread. The dread was not entirely a selfish one: it was a fear lest he might never be able to atone to Priscilla for the wrong he had done her. last the scales had fallen from his eyes. people round him were showing him what Priscilla had been to them, thus teaching him the part she had played in his life. His limbs trembled: his teeth chattered. Despair held him in a silence as of death. At Malden's entrance he looked up and fell to a pitiful moaning that set the women sobbing. Malden laid his hand on his shoulder. "Tell me what you fear."

Dunstane told the story brokenly, blaming himself for having driven Priscilla from her home.

She had said she would take a red'bus and go as far as Kensington Church. She was fond of the drive... That was at three o'clock, and nothing had been heard of her since... He had noticed a strange expression on her face when she went out... and she had kissed him... the first time for months... and said good-bye

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- ... She had never intended to come back ... He had driven her to her death."
- "She has been taken ill, and is lying at some police-station or hospital," Malden said.
- "Ay, run in for drunk and disorderly when it's only fits—like many a woman before her," said Mrs. Gibson from the doorway.
- "Do you mean to say you have made no enquiries?" Malden asked.

Dunstane looked at him in weak despair.

The other men had only just heard of it. They were willing to go anywhere, to do anything, for Mrs. Momerie.

He sent them to Kensington, Hammersmith; to ask at police-stations... railway-stations.

He himself was going to St. George's Hospital. If she had been taken ill nearer home she would have got back to the Buildings. He waived Dunstane's theory. Priscilla was not a woman who would commit suicide.

He went from place to place, further west still. He heard of women who had been taken, ill or dying, to the different hospitals, but he did not find Priscilla. It was too late to search successfully.

At last he turned homewards. The others might have had better luck... or she might

have returned . . . He jumped into a hanson and dashed back to Regent's Buildings.

The sound of the wheels brought heads to the windows. The Buildings had never been s lighted up at that hour in all the years of the existence.

The heads were thrust into the bitterness of the winter night... Had he found her? Had he heard anything? The questions told him they had not found her; they knew nothing...

He dragged himself up to the flat when Dunstane lay crushed, moaning that Priscilli would never come back... He had lost her—his only solace, the one comfort of his life. His grief had reached the garrulous stage. Priscilla was passing rapidly from the woman to the angel. In the midst of his distress Malder could foresee the place Priscilla would fill in Dunstane's eloquence in the days to come, should she not return to her position as household drudge.

Miss Cardrew and Gertrude were there, sitting dumb and tortured. Malden did not notice them.

Back into his room again . . . to pace up and down. He could not sit still . . . and there was nothing to be done till morning . . . Was it pos-

WHERE IS PRISCILLA?

sible that she had gone away because he was coming back?

He could not think that of her either. She was not a coward . . . She knew her own strength.

He grew sick and faint as his thoughts led him this way and that;—there was nothing to explain her silence but death . . . If she had been alive she would have sent to them.

Supper was on the table. He tried to eat, but the food choked him.

He walked up and down listening to the murmur of Dunstane's cheerless monologue.

Other people from the Buildings came into the studio to talk sadly of what had happened. They would have to go to their work the next day; but to-night they watched with Mrs. Momerie... They could not sleep till they knew that no harm had come to her... She had been such a friend to them all.

Malden listened to the poor souls, biting his lips and hardening the muscles round his mouth as he heard what Priscilla had done for them . . . Their talk was all of Mrs. Momerie . . . Her merry ways, her kind heart, her goodness to the children; the clothes she had mended; the rooms she had cleaned; the sick she had nursed; the

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difference she had made in their lives; their changed homes... The women wept as they remembered these things. The men spoke stolidly, clearing their throats...

At last he could bear it no longer, and he dashed out again; he must look for her till he found her. He had searched among the dead and dying; now he would look for her among the living. He had forgotten that it was three o'clock, midnight and midwinter. There was no one in the streets but the policeman. The city was asleep. Even the children of the night were hidden in deeper shadow. There was no roar of the human sea: the tide had ebbed far off and sobbed on the misty shore of dreams.

He walked on and on, along the empty channels of the torrent; hearing Priscilla's name in the sound of his noisy footfall, seeing her face borne on the night . . .

He rang the night-bell at one or two hospitals, and was bidden to come again in the morning. At the police stations it was the same thing: "Enquire at Scotland Yard in the morning."

And with what slow feet the morning drew on! And at last it came, so darkly, so drearily, he did not know it was morning.

A bell clanged out eight strokes.

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He looked round him dazed. He was in the Euston Road close to Regent's Buildings. He had unconsciously wandered home.

It was cold and raw and foggy; there were very few people about.

A weary-looking nurse was coming out of the gate of the New Hospital for Women. He saw her, and his face woke from its apathy. Then it settled down again into despair. No, it was impossible. If Priscilla were there so close at hand, they would have heard of her long ago... He had already asked if any young woman had been taken there, and been answered... And yet... He lifted his soft felt as the nurse passed him. She stopped to answer his question.

"Yes, a case had been brought in yesterday... concussion, brain and spine... but the woman was neither young nor pretty... about forty... No, she could not be the girl he described..."

She was moving away when she turned again.

- "Her clothes are marked 'P. M."
- "Priscilla Momerie," he answered dully.
- "Then—it is strange—it may be the person after all . . . She fell from the top of a 'bus . . . coming down the steps . . . She has been unconscious ever since."

His lips twitched.

- "She is only twenty-four . . . but it might . . . Would they let me see if . . . if . . ."
- "Not at this hour... no one can be admitted so soon. You must come later..."
 - "I have been seeking her all night."

She looked pityingly at his grey face, the eyes dim in their hollow sockets. Those unsteady lips pleaded for him.

"I don't know..." she hesitated... "I might... under the circumstances... You can come with me, and I will ask..."

He followed her into the hospital. By-and-by she returned. "Yes, you can come; she is unconscious still and the paralysis gains on her."

His knees shook under him as he followed through the empty ward. Had he found her at last?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PROCESSION OF ANGELS CARRYING LILIES.

A SCREEN was round a bed at the end of the room; he went with the nurse behind the screen; his eyes, outstripping his feet, reached the pillow first.

The face he saw was shrunken, and a chalky whiteness sharpened the mouth. The eyes were closed.

The years that cried from every line of cheek and brow made him catch his breath with a great sob.

"No, it is not Priscilla! Thank God! Thank God!"

At the sound of his voice her eyes unclosed.

"Have you brought Dollie?"

Faint and dim as they were, the tones were Priscilla's—the eyes were Priscilla's!

"Oh, my God!"

He held on to the head of the bed, and the nurses turned and went out of sight of his grief.

The light grew until her eyes saw clearly.

"It is you!" she whispered.

He steadied his face and took her hand in his.

- "I have come, you see." His smile was terrible.
 - "Did they send?" she asked faintly.
 - "I found you."
 - "I am glad."

He gazed down at her. It was hard to see her like this, but he held himself in a tight grip.

- "Dunstane must come," said Priscilla.
- "I will bring him."
- "He will be lonely . . ."
- "Don't . . . I will do . . . what I can"
- "No . . . what is right."
- "You will help me."
- "Right was best before . . ." she smiled faintly.
 - "Yes!"
 - "And happiest . . ."
 - "Yes, always."

Presently she spoke again . . .

- "I shall have Dollie . . . and the locusts . . . The years—what was it?"
- "The years that the locusts have eaten," he said hoarsely.
 - "Those . . . I will restore."

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Her voice sunk . . . A white drowsiness was quenching the light on her face.

Malden bent over her.

- "Do vou know me, Priscilla?"
- "Yes, Dunstane," she smiled.

She closed her eyes, muttering:

"I will restore the years . . . the years . . ."

Malden's heart froze as he saw the light dying from her face . . . She shivered.

"Dollie kissed me . . . so cold . . . "

He turned to the nurse, a question in his eyes.

She came nearer.

"It may be some time yet . . . when the paralysis touches the brain . . ."

Suddenly she opened her eyes . . . they shone like stars, but her voice was thick and low.

"The years! the years... painted on the wall... the locusts did not eat them... they made angels... They are coming..." she laughed... "walking along the wall... A procession... angels carrying lilies."

Her voice died away. Malden held his breath.

"What are their names?" she muttered.

Malden took her hand in his.

"Don't you know me, Priscilla?"

She stared blankly at him.

"Bring fresh horses," she said hoarsely . . .

"Failure, Pain, Death, another team . . . "

The nurse came nearer.

"She is wandering . . . I think it would be wise . . ."

He looked appealingly at her, drawing in his breath with a sharp sound.

- "You can come again, later."
- "I will come again," he said, smiling palely, "I will come again."

He lifted her hand, holding it tightly.

"Don't you know me, Priscilla?"

She opened her eyes again . . .

- "They call him Death," she whispered.
- "No, no, Priscilla . . . Life! . . . not Death."

She laughed shrilly.

"Fresh horses—another team! . . . Bring fresh horses . . ."

He could not leave her like that. He stooped, holding her eyes, her hand tight in his grasp.

"Priscilla! Oh, my love, don't you know me?"

The perspiration was thick on his forehead.

"Love... Pain, Death... carrying lilies..." she said blankly. Down the long ward her

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shrill little voice followed him: "Love, Pain, Death,—carrying lilies."

The rain was pouring down. The wind tossed and flattened it against the windows of the hospital. It clamoured on the panes, like fingers impatiently tapping. It was a face pressed close to peer inside the ward where Priscilla lay.

In the road the roar of the human sea was muffled: it rolled along sullenly, like an underbeat of the storm rolling overhead. The wind roared louder than the roar of the traffic, silencing the trains...

The skies had triumphed over earth.

In the empty ward everything was still; life slowed down to the beat of death.

It was visitors' day. But the one patient was not expecting visitors through the rain and the storm . . .

But visitors were coming down the ward, escorted by the nurse.

Malden guided Dunstane, who tottered and trembled at every step stricken with the anguish of manhood awakened at last. The women's faces were strained and drawn. They passed behind the screen at the end of the room.

At the sight of the bed Malden set his teeth

in a hard line. Pain and Death had run more swiftly than Love... The angels stood at the gate of the sepulchre, seeing the grave-clothes...

He helped Dunstane into the chair, then went round to the other side of the bed, and stood looking down at her.

"Was that Priscilla?... O God! Priscilla?"

He shut his eyes from the sight of her; but he opened them again... Even so... it was the dearest face on earth... and earth was claiming it.

"There must be some mistake . . . It can't be Priscilla," Gertrude whispered.

He could not speak, but he pointed to the card over the bed . . . Her name was there.

"Our dear Priscilla," Miss Cardrew sobbed.

She lifted one of the hands lying on the counterpane, and stroked it with her numb fingers. Gertrude knelt down and hid her head in the bed-clothes to shut out the sight of Priscilla.

And outside the wind roared, and the rain beat on the window trying to see where she was drifting past on the outgoing tide.

Mrs. Markham and Susie and Jimmy Gibson came in. They had struggled through the rain, and Susie had brought her doll in its cradle—Priscilla's gift. She put them on the

bed, her eyes round with terror. Mrs. Markham drew a bundle from under her cloak. It was one of the twins in the old white shawl:

"I thought she might ha' liked the loan of her . . . but . . . but . . . "

She broke off, and hid her face in the shawl.

Jimmy had thrown down his red handkerchief on the bed, and was crying naturally in his sleeve, waking the ward with his sobs. Mrs. Markham took him away with Susie.

Gertrude lifted her head. The handkerchief reminded her of one he had waved three years ago in honour of a daughter of the Queen. This lay like the colours on a dead soldier... But Priscilla wasn't dead! She would get better... she would live.

She looked yearningly into the face, marred by its awful anguish . . . Priscilla had been like that when Dollie was born . . . And she had lived—she would live now.

Her sobs shook the bed. Malden's hand on her shoulder quieted her.

He stood there with ashen face, his eyes frozen... He had been in time... That was something...

There was a deep hush in the ward.

Outside the wind shrieked, the sullen roar

came nearer... It was the moan of the great waters. Priscilla was drifting past—one of the white faces that the waves bear out to the wider sea beyond the human sea.

She lay with her eyes closed, knowing nothing of the love she had won, the pity of the hearts she had touched, the cold waters bearing her out to wintry seas . . .

Was that Priscilla, who did not comfort them though they wept?

It was time to go; the ward must be cleared. The rain beating on the window could see in, for the room was lighted. It could see the group behind the screen, but not the wrung hearts weighted by their great love and sorrow.

The moan of the sea was in the ward: it throbbed round them, rising and falling. The little white beds drifted down the sides of the long room... One face whiter than the beds drifted past more swiftly...

The nurse came nearer, and whispered to Malden.

The set line of his mouth tightened.

Gertrude, her face hidden in the clothes, shook the bed unreproved. Miss Cardrew still fondled the hand that had grown colder than her fingers.

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Malden drew himself up, shivering. He stooped again and kissed Priscilla's face.

Then he laid his hand on Gertrude's arm:

"Come, dear."

She took his hand, weeping passionately, and so he led her away.

Miss Cardrew's sobs broke out at last:

"She said she would never see death! Thank God!"

She turned to Dunstane, her thin little figure shaking pitifully.

"Our . . . dear . . . Priscilla!" she sobbed.

He looked at her dazed.

"Not . . . not . . . she is not?"

"Yes," she sobbed. "But . . . but . . . to Frodsham . . . with us . . . where she can see . . . the skies . . ."

Dunstane tottered to his feet and stood gazing at the dead face, in silence.

Dunstane was sitting in a chair, his face in his hands. A limp and pitiful object he was, and Miss Cardrew could not restrain her tears as she looked at him. Gertrude's heart had long ago melted at the sight of his hopeless misery. Malden's eyes were on the picture over the mantelpiece—all that remained now of mother

and child; for in twenty-four hours Priscilla would be sleeping beside Dollie in the church-yard at Frodsham.

The scene in the hospital the day before had drawn these four very close together; the personal element passing out of their relations under the spell of the sorrow they shared. Malden stood beside the man he had wronged and the girl whose life he had shadowed, linked to them by the dead woman whom each had loved. They might have been members of one family facing the breaking up of their home as they talked sadly together of the future.

Miss Cardrew's proposal was to go with Dunstane to Frodsham, and to establish him in the little shop which she would manage.

- "You will then be able to complete your great work in quiet," she concluded. "And I shall esteem it a privilege to minister to the comfort of one whom our dear Priscilla loved."
- "That seems to be a good plan," said Malden, waking from his reverie. "It is impossible for you to stay on alone in this place. I shall not return to it after . . . after to-morrow," he added huskily.

At the words Gertrude lifted her head quickly, but she did not look at him. Her black dress

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and heavy eyes gave her a pathetic air, and something in her sharp movement touched Malden. He turned to her gently.

"What are you going to do, Gertrude?" he asked.

Her face was white and set and resolute. She looked steadily before her.

- "I shall remain in the Buildings, and try to carry on Priscilla's work."
- "But you will be very lonely, dear; and it will not be easy to fill our dear Priscilla's place," said Miss Cardrew. "You cannot do what she did for the people."
- "She loved them; and I will love them for her sake," said Gertrude simply.

Miss Cardrew put her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"My dear, you will be the only one of us left who know her, what she is . . . was. . ." Her voice shook.

Dunstane lifted himself, turning a haggard face towards them. "I have made up my mind to stay here too, in the home she made for me," he said hoarsely.

- "But . . . my dear Mr. Momerie . . . your great work . . ." stammered Miss Cardrew.
 - "I have burnt it," he said. "I could never

have gone on with it. She was sacrificed to it."

He broke off and there was a strained quiet in the room.

In the silence they heard the steady "tap, tap" of the undertaker below. He was finishing Priscilla's coffin. The sound was terrible. Dunstane made haste to silence it.

"I shall never write the New Religion," he went on brokenly. "I shall never write a book at all. I am going to teach... as she wished... It is not too late to do what she wished..."

There was another silence. Malden went to the window and stared out into the darkness. At the end of the road he could see the lights in the New Hospital. They were a bright barrier between himself and Priscilla, for whose sake he could not take up the burden of life.

He had always despised Dunstane; yet Dunstane was showing more manhood than he, and more love for Priscilla in his attitude towards the future. In leaving the Buildings Malden had only thought of himself.

Half-unconsciously he heard Miss Cardrew's shaky treble. She assured Dunstane it would cost her nothing to give up the Frodsham scheme. She had decided to keep on her room.

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She would be much happier in the Buildings, among her old friends; oh, much happier. Though indeed there was little happiness left for any of them now that they had lost dear Priscilla.

Malden turned abruptly from the window and held out his hand to Dunstane. His voice was very low.

"You have proved me a coward . . . I can't go away . . . We must help each other for her sake . . ."

He turned on his heel and went away to his own flat. From his window he could see the room in the hospital where Priscilla was lying. That side of the building was dark, and the cold night was a link between them.

The traffic in the Euston Road was stopped. Omnibus and carriage and cab must make way for Priscilla, who was passing along the thoroughfare between the hospital and station.

It was a strange procession, and not without pomp and pride in spite of the simple hearse, and the one coach in which Miss Cardrew and Dunstane followed their dead. Gertrude had gone before to King's Cross; Malden walked close to the hearse.

Behind him came, in tattered ranks, a long line of poor souls who had lost a friend.

The people from the Buildings were there, dressed in black borrowed or hired for the occasion. And with them were people from the dingy streets round about, bedraggled women, miserable men, white-faced children, who wore no mourning save their heavy hearts. They followed Priscilla two by two, with bent heads, silently. They were going with her to the train that would bear her to her rest under blue skies. Euston Road paused in its business to wonder at the strange thing it saw—that procession of the poor carrying their lowly grief;—but Priscilla passed on silently and in great humility.

The crowd on the pavements swelled; and about the procession gathered the waifs and strays of St. Pancras', whose heedless questions pointed the silence of those other waifs that mourned.

The woman playing the barrel-organ ceased her grinding to wonder with the rest.

"I suppose it's somebody grand wot they are takin' aw'y to be buried," she said. "They couldn't make more fuss for the Queen herself. I never seed such a crowd at a buryin' before."

"Nor I," said the woman beside her. "But



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lor! 'tain't nobody of no account. She were only a pore young woman wot lived in them workmen's dwellings."

So, with a smile on her lips, Priscilla passed on from the city of the living to the city of the dead—a daughter of the people.

THE END.

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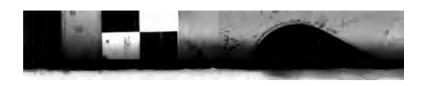
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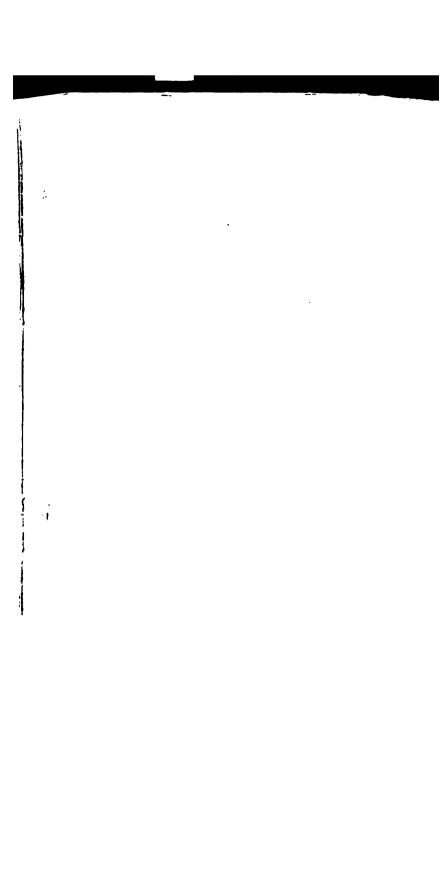
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